

# **Agentivity and Participant Marking in Dena'ina Athabaskan: A Text-Based Study**

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vorgelegt von  
**Olga Charlotte Lovick**, geb. Müller  
aus Köln

angenommen von  
Prof. Dr. Hans-Jürgen Sasse  
Prof. Dr. Fritz Serzisko

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## Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with strategies of participant marking in narrative texts in Dena'ina Athabascan, a language spoken in south-central Alaska. Dena'ina is a highly head-marking, polysynthetic language, and all referents (subjects, direct objects and postpositional objects) are encoded by pronominal affixes to the verb stem, as opposed to free pronouns or noun phrases.

After a short introduction into the grammar of the language (chapter 1), the pronominal inventory as well as basic pronominal functions are explored (chapter 2).

It is then shown that there is a significant asymmetry between the pronominal marking of first and second person referents (so called discourse referents) and of third person referents. These differences are: Discourse referents are always overtly encoded by a prefix, while third person referents can be encoded by null-marking; also, first and second person are marked in a different position within the verb word than third person prefixes. First and second person prefixes display case-marking, third person prefixes do not.

An interesting semantic difference between prefixes encoding discourse referents on the one hand, and third person prefixes on the other, is that the latter group agree with their referent with respect to features such as animacy or human-ness. Several examples are presented where the narrator makes use of this mechanism either to keep track of several referents without explicitly naming them, or to express his or her attitude towards particular referents, by either down- or upgrading them.

It is concluded that first and second person on the one hand constitute a different category than third person on the other hand. Third person prefixes act more like semantic class markers than like pronominals (chapter 5).

Last of all, the question of the interpretation of noun phrases ('who did what to whom') is addressed, seeing that there is no case marking to disambiguate. It is shown that Dena'ina employs marking patterns based on assumptions on the 'natural order of things': such a pattern indicates whether a high-ranking referent acts on a low ranking one or vice versa. The listener then has to use world knowledge to decide which of the referents is higher ranking than the other.

## Abbreviations

1	1 <sup>st</sup> person	REFL	reflexive
2	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	REL	relativizer
AREAL	areal	RO	ropelike object
B	<i>b-</i> marked	S	subject
CH'-	<i>ch'</i> - indefinite	SAO	singular animate
CON	conative	object	
DIST	distributive plural	SEM	semelfactive
EVID	evidential	SFX	suffix
FO	fabriclike object	SG	singular
FUT	future	SRO	singular round object
GEN	gender marker	VV	voice/valence marker
INC	incorporate	Y	<i>y-</i> marked
INDEF	indefinite		
IP	inceptive		
IPF	imperfective		
ITER	iterative		
LEX	lexical-thematic prefix		
LRO	long rigid object		
NEUT	neuter		
O	direct object		
OPT	optative		
P	postpositional object		
PF	perfective		
PL	plural		
POSS	possessor		
PROG	progressive		
PRON	free personal pronoun		
Q	<i>q-</i> marked		
QB	<i>qub-</i> marked		
QUAL	qualifier		
REC	reciprocal		

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## 0 The start

The road that led to the present thesis was long and winding. In 2001, I became interested in the pronominal system of Athabascan, which resulted in a study of the use of the so-called fourth person in Chiricahua Apache (Müller 2002). In 2002, my interest in Dena'ina was awakened, and I decided on writing my thesis on cohesion in Dena'ina narratives; a topic this language is ideal for because of the immense corpus of narratives. (There is no output from this era.)

Some time into the process, though, I became fascinated with what is commonly called the '*y*- subject' in that language. In most Athabascan languages, this *y*- prefix can function only as direct or postpositional object marker and as possessor prefix. In Dena'ina, however, it can also function as a subject marker. Or so they say.

### 0.1 The idea

The object of this study is to show that this is not the case. *Y*- in Dena'ina is not a subject marker – but it also is not a direct object marker. The same is true for the Areal prefix *q*- and possibly even for the plain indefinite marker *k'*-. In fact, they cannot even be called pronominals. The only thing these markers and real pronominal affixes have in common is that they both are co-indexed with referents. A true pronominal prefix in Dena'ina agrees with its referent in number, person and case while the *y*- prefix, the Areal and the plain indefinite marker agree with their referents only with respect to number – sometimes – and certain semantic features, usually subsumed under the label 'gender'<sup>1</sup> or 'qualifier'.

This idea is not entirely new to Athabascan linguistics. Rice's (2000) study concludes with respect to the third person pronominal prefixes (the prefixes termed non-pronominal in this study, plus several others) that they are not person agreement at all (in contrast to the first and second person prefixes), but that they 'instantiate the functional category of (...) Number' (Rice 2000:189). This functional category is distinct from Person (which is instantiated by first and second person prefixes), and is marked in a different position within the verb word. With respect to object marking, the same distinction (first and second person = category

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'gender' in Athabascan linguistics does not encode the contrast masculine/feminine/neuter, but refers rather to a semantic noun classification system. In the classic view (as e.g. by Krauss 1968, Tenenbaum 1978), there are four genders in Athabascan: *d*- 'wooden, or made of skin', *n*- 'small and round', *dn*- 'heavy and dense', and unmarked (everything else; after Tenenbaum 1978:135). The term 'qualifier' is used for a slightly wider range of prefixes. See chapter 1 for greater detail.

Person, third person = category Number) is made, even though the two categories are marked in the same position within the verb word (Rice 2000:210).

Problematic with this analysis is, at least with respect to Dena'ina, that Rice assumes a clear-cut distinction of subject and object marking. It will be shown, however, that at least in the domain of third person prefixes, no such distinction can be maintained for Dena'ina.

Tuttle and Hargus (2004) go a bit further in saying that in Proto-Athabaskan, the Areal marker and the *y*- prefix are part of the qualifier (gender) zone of the Athabaskan verb. In some of the daughter languages (not Dena'ina), the prefixes have then 'moved' into the pronominal zone of the verbs and function nowadays as true pronominals. I will here follow the hypothesis of Tuttle and Hargus (2004) and treat Dena'ina as a language in which at least some of the third person prefixes are qualifiers rather than pronominal prefixes<sup>2</sup>.

## 0.2 The structure

This study is tri-partite. In the first two chapters, some background information to the Dena'ina language in general (chapter 1) and the 'pronominal' system of Dena'ina (chapter 2) are given. In the second part, chapters 3 and 4, object and possessor marking (chapter 3) and subject marking (chapter 4) are discussed in great detail. Finally, the last two chapters address the fact that some of the so-called pronominals are more appropriately considered qualifier prefixes, and are concerned with additional evidence and some issues that arise from such a view.

## 0.3 A note on terminology

Some of the terms used in this study are not as clear and unambiguous as I would like them to be. Take for example the term 'subject marker'. This term is used here for two different things:

- i. for a pronominal of the first and second person that functions as the S or A argument of a clause
- ii. for a qualifier prefix that is co-indexed with the S or the A argument of a clause

The same is true for the term object: a pronominal of the first or second person that functions as the O or P,<sup>3</sup> or a qualifier prefix that is co-indexed with the O or P

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<sup>2</sup> For a differentiation of the pronominal zone and the qualifier zone of the Athabaskan verb, see Kari (1989).

<sup>3</sup> O: direct object, P: postpositional object. In the literature on objects, the abbreviation E, after the term *extension* for any but non-core arguments is also used (e.g. by Onishi 2001). In the Athabaskan literature, however, P is more usually used than E, so I will follow that tradition.

argument of the clause.

Or the term pronominal, even worse! A pronominal (or pronominal prefix, the two of them will be used interchangeably here) is either a first or second person subject or object marker, or a qualifier prefix that is co-indexed with any argument of the clause.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, we will use the following conventions:

The term ‘subject’ refers to the A or S argument of a clause. The term ‘subject marker’ refers to any prefix that is, by whichever features, co-indexed with this argument. The same thing applies for the term ‘object’: The term ‘object’ refers to the O and P arguments of a clause, and the term ‘object marker’ accordingly to any prefix that is co-indexed with either.

There is no meaning distinction implied in the use of the terms ‘postpositional object’ and ‘oblique object’.

First and second person subject and object prefixes will throughout this study be referred to as ‘pronominals’ or ‘pronominal prefixes’. Other prefixes that may be co-indexed with arguments will be called ‘third person prefixes’ or, from chapter 5 on, ‘gender markers/qualifiers’. The term ‘unmarked third person prefixes’ will be used to refer (a) to zeroes that are by default interpreted as third person and (b) to a certain plural prefix *q-*. The reasons for this will become clear in chapter 3.

Finally, one note on transitivity. The word ‘transitive’ is oftentimes used for all verbs that take two arguments – irrespective of whether these arguments are a subject and a direct object or a subject and a postpositional object – and in other cases, it refers merely to verbs that take a subject and a direct object. The latter view will be adopted in this study. Verbs that take a subject and a postpositional object will be called bivalent.

This term then hopefully covers both inherently intransitive verbs that are accompanied by a postposition that introduces a non-obligatory participant, and verbs that have an incorporated postposition and therefore by necessity take two arguments. Examples are:

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the term ‘anaphora’ might be used to refer to this latter group, but of course, this would confuse readers that have a more formal background than I do – the confusion would just be shifted to a different group of people.

(0.1a) Intransitive verb without postposition

gheshjuł

I was walking

‘I went’

(0.1b) Intransitive verb with optional postposition

beł            ghesjuł

with.her      I was walking

‘I was walking with her’

(0.2a) Bivalent verb theme without object

\* ch’a’eshju

(0.2b) Bivalent verb theme with object

bech’a’eshju

b-    ch’a-    eshju

BO-   from-   walking

‘I left her’

In the example in (0.1), the postposition is not part of the verb theme. The basic meaning of the theme stays the same: the subject is walking along. The postposition does not change the meaning, it merely introduces another participant into the action. This is not true for the sentences in (0.2). The postposition *ch’a* -is an integral part of the verb theme *P#ch’a+yw*<sup>5,6</sup> ‘leave’. Leaving out the postposition results in a different verb theme (the one in (0.1)); leaving out the object prefix results in an ungrammatical sentence (0.2a). Despite this difference, both kinds of verbs with only a subject and a postpositional object will be called bivalent throughout this study.

Apart from that, the usual Athabaskanists’ terminology that sometimes is so irritating to other linguists will be employed, with one exception: The ‘classifier’ will be called voice-/valence marker (or VV-marker), as the traditional term is too confusing for a non-Athabaskanist, especially in contrast to the term ‘qualifier’.

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<sup>5</sup> More on the representation of verb themes can be found in chapter 1.3.1.2.

<sup>6</sup> The initial consonant of the stem *yw* changes to *ju* if immediately preceded by the first person singular subject prefix *esb-*.

#### **0.4 The data**

All Dena'ina examples will be presented in the practical orthography. In some cases, a separate line with a phonemic representation will be included; this will be indicated by square brackets.

Examples taken from texts or from other (published) materials will be referenced.

All examples without a reference stem from my own fieldwork.

## 1 About the language

This chapter is meant to be a short introduction to the Dena'ina language. For lack of space, most topics will be but touched upon, and the reader will be referred to other, more detailed studies if available. It must be said that there is not a lot of published material available on the language, and my own fieldwork has been concentrating on the aspects of storytelling and pronominal marking.

Thus, the (grammatical) sketch of Dena'ina presented here is just that: a sketch. It is not a complete grammar. The aim of this sketch is to equip the reader with the necessary knowledge to understand the glosses and, hopefully, to point out topics for further research, as much work needs to be done on Dena'ina. Several topics are just mentioned briefly, as sufficient systematic data is not available to me at this point.

As with any overview, details have been omitted.

### 1.1 Geographical setting, linguistic affiliation, typology

Dena'ina (also known as Tanaina)<sup>1</sup> is an Alaskan Athabaskan language, spoken by about 50 people in south-central Alaska. The Dena'ina area covers 41,000 sq. miles (Kari and Fall 2003:10) on both sides of the Cook Inlet, including the area north of Lake Iliamna on both sides of the Alaska Range, then across the Knik Arm and the Susitna drainage area, around Turnagain Arm and in the western half of the Kenai Peninsula.

Thus, Dena'ina country is divided by both the Cook Inlet and the Alaska Range, which accounts for the great dialectal variation.

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<sup>1</sup> In the literature on the language, both the old spelling Tanaina and the new spelling Dena'ina are used. In this study, the language will be called Dena'ina, unless quoting references where the other system is employed. The name Dena'ina means 'people'. Pronunciation of the name varies with the dialect: In the Inland dialects, the glottal stop is pronounced [dɛnɛʔmɛ], while it is left out in the Upper Inland dialect [dɛnɛmɛ]. In both cases, the penultimate syllable is stressed.



Map 1: Languages of Alaska. Source: [www.uaf.edu/anlc](http://www.uaf.edu/anlc)

According to Kari and Fall (2003:10), an estimated 3000 to 5000 people historically populated this area before contact with white people. By Alaskan standards, this is a very dense population. This is due to the relatively mild climate and to the coastal environment.

The Dena'ina are the only people speaking a Northern Athabascan language living on the seacoast. This has impacted both the Dena'ina culture and the Dena'ina lexicon, which contains a number of lexical items not found in any other Athabascan language.

Nowadays, Dena'ina is a highly endangered language. The approximately 50 speakers are for the most part more than 60 years old. Even in the 1970's, when Joan Tenenbaum began the first extensive linguistic fieldwork in the area, no children were learning the language, and unfortunately, this trend has continued. However, there are several revitalization projects at the moment, and interest in the Dena'ina language and culture is very vivid, so it may be hoped that the language does stand a chance of surviving after all.

Dena'ina is part of the Athabascan language family, a continuum of closely related languages stretching from central Alaska down to the Pacific coast in California, and to Arizona and New Mexico. The Athabascan languages can be divided into the Pacific Coast Athabascan languages, the most prominent representative being Hupa, the Apachean language group, including Navajo, one of

the most vital indigenous languages of the North American continent, and the Northern Athabascan languages. The Northern Athabascan languages are sometimes divided into the Alaskan and the Canadian branches, although it has to be pointed out that this distinction is more based on politics than on linguistic (dis-) similarities.

Dena'ina is a Northern Athabascan language. Its closest relative is Ahtna, spoken to the north-east of the Dena'ina language area (see Map 1 for the neighboring languages of Dena'ina).

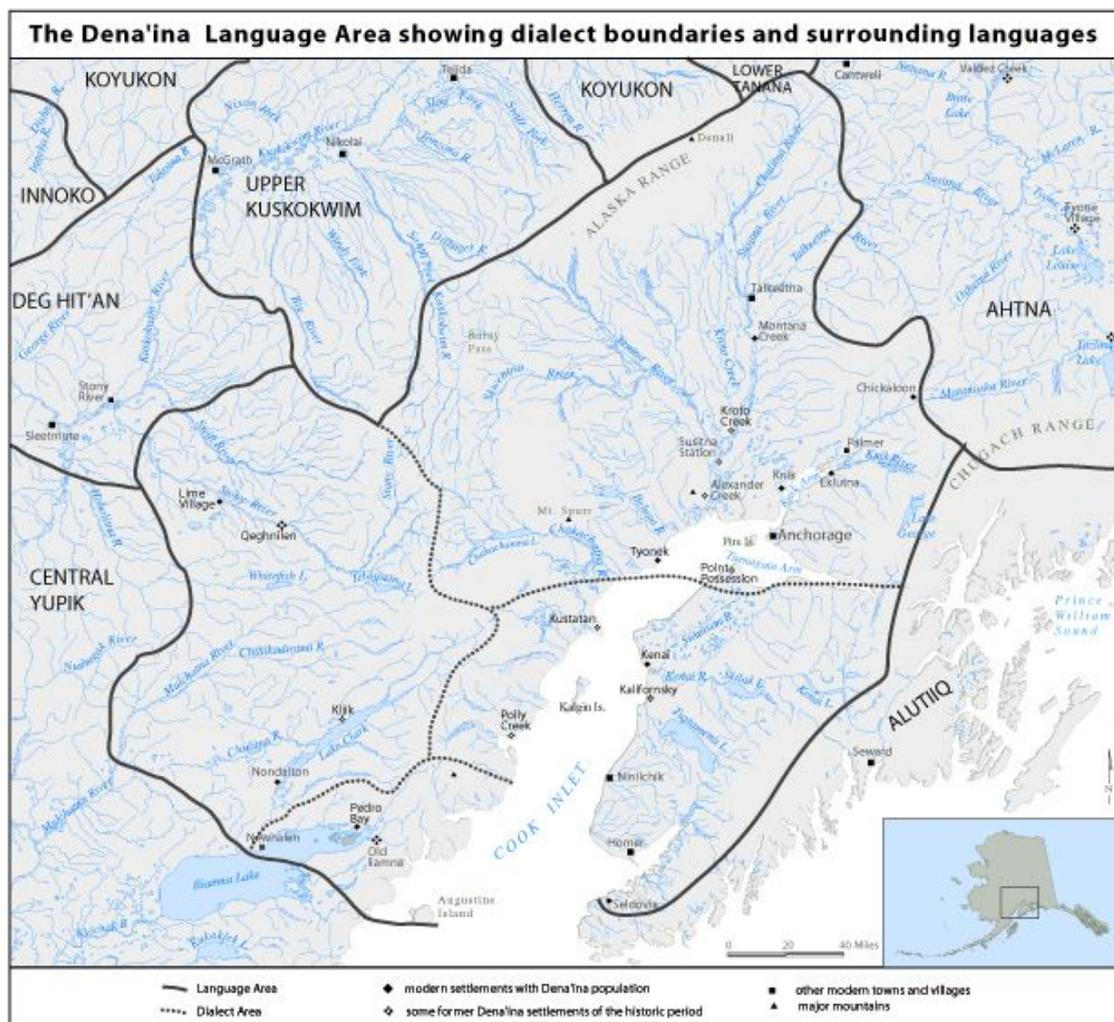
Other neighboring Athabascan languages are Deg Hit'an (Ingalik), Upper Kuskokwim, Koyukon, and (Lower) Tanana. Most of the Dena'ina language area was divided from these languages by the Alaska Range, so contact was minimal (albeit existent, as shown by the opening section of the story of Diqelas Tukda, who went to trade with the Upper Kuskokwim Athabascans). Several of the consultants I have worked with are descended from Deg Hit'an ancestors, so there is some measure of bilingualism.

Dena'ina also shares a linguistic (and cultural) boundary with Yup'ik and Sugpiaq. However, traditionally relations have not been good and there has been little cultural or linguistic exchange.

The arrival of the Russians in the 1780s provided the first contact between the Dena'ina communities and the white people. Russian fur traders built several forts on the western half of the Kenai Peninsula. During the 18th century, the Dena'ina converted to the Russian Orthodox Faith, which is still held by most of them. Interestingly, neither the Bible nor any liturgy were ever translated into the Dena'ina language, even though translations of religious literature exist for other peoples colonized by the Russians of that time, e.g. Aleut, Yup'ik, Tlingit and Sugpiaq. Up to this day, there is nearly no religious literature in the language, except for the translation of several prayers by Peter Kalifornsky (1991).

Because of the large terrain covered by the Dena'ina, and because of the travel difficulties within that area (both the Alaska Range and the Cook Inlet divide villages), Dena'ina can be divided into several major dialect groups, although it must be noted that within some of these groups, dialectal variation is enormous. The dialects are mutually intelligible; Tenenbaum puts it this way: "My informants in Nondalton readily understood lexical items in the Kenai "Dena'ina Noun Dictionary" (...), but quickly pointed out, "That's Kenai lingo." (1978:22)

According to Kari (1975b:4f.), Dena'ina is divided into the two groups of Upper Inlet Dena'ina and Lower Inlet Dena'ina. This division is based on various consonantal differences. In Upper Inlet Dena'ina, the Proto-Athabascan /*\*ts/* and /*\*ch/* series has been merged to an intermediate affricate /*t͡s/*. Proto-Athabascan /*\*z/*, /*\*zh/*, and /*\*ɣ/* have been merged to /*y/*, while /*\*ɣ̃/* has become /*ʃ/*. Within Lower Inlet Dena'ina, there are several subdivisions, mainly Outer Inlet (spoken on the Kenai peninsula in Kenai and Seldovia and on the west side of the Cook Inlet in Kustatan), Inland (spoken in Nondalton and Lime Village) and Iliamna (spoken in Pedro Bay, Old Iliamna and the Lake Iliamna area). See Map 2 for Dena'ina dialects.



Map 2: Dena'ina dialects. Base map is courtesy of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve and Barbara Bundy, text by James Kari.

The most vital Dena'ina dialect is the Inland dialect, spoken today mostly in Nondalton and Lime Village. This is also the dialect with the youngest fluent speakers. The Inland dialect was studied extensively by Joan Tenenbaum in the 1970s, and many examples here are drawn from texts that she collected. Still spoken by a few speakers in Tyonek, Anchorage and Eklutna is the Upper Inlet dialect. It is not likely that there are more than ten speakers. The probably greatest storyteller of the Dena'ina (and possibly, all of Alaska), Shem Pete, was a speaker of the Upper Inlet dialect, therefore the collection of stories for this dialect is even larger than that for the Inland dialect.

The other two dialects are even more endangered. The Outer Inlet dialect is practically extinct, although some of the elders in Kenai seem to be remembering their language once again. The Iliamna dialect, on the other hand, has by now been heavily influenced by the Inland dialect due to intensive contact and intermarriage between these groups.

An excellent study of Dena'ina dialects is Kari (1975b). In the following section, the main differences between the dialects will be discussed in order to facilitate understanding of the examples.

Upper Inlet [b] has become [v] in the Inland dialects and [w] in the Kenai dialect. This dialectal variation is reflected in the orthography (the phonemic and orthographic system of Dena'ina is introduced under 1.2). Cf. the word for 'spruce' in the three dialect groups:

(1.1a) Inland dialect

[tʃ<sup>h</sup>valʌ]  
ch'vala

(1.1b) Upper Inlet dialect

[tʃ<sup>h</sup>balʌ]  
ch'bala

(1.1c) Kenai dialect

[tʃ<sup>h</sup>walʌ]  
ch'wala

In Nondalton, the glottal verb suffix -' is still present, while it has disappeared in all other dialects.

(1.2a) Nondalton/Lime Village (Kari 1975b:6))

gheshdu'  
'I stayed'

(1.2b) all other dialects (ibid.)

gheshdu  
'I stayed'

(1.3a) Nondalton/Lime Village (ibid.)

beɫ ghesdu'en  
'the one I stayed with'

(1.3b) all other dialects (ibid.)

beɫ ghesdunen  
'the one I stayed with'

Kari (1975b:6f.) notes that speakers of other dialects do not hear the final glottal stop in (1.2). This view is supported by the fact that the form of the relativizing suffix *-(n)en* is chosen accordingly: Speakers of the Nondalton dialects choose the allomorph *-en* that is used after consonantal ending, speakers of other dialects the allomorph *-nen*, the one used after vocalic ending.

Another feature distinguishing the Upper Inlet dialect from all others is the behavior of the fricative /z/ and the corresponding affricate /ʒ/. In the Upper Inlet dialect, all /z/ and /ʒ/ become /y/. This can be clearly observed in the inceptive verb forms, as they always contain one of the z-modes. The /z-/ of the z-imperfective<sup>2</sup> triggers vowel lowering, so the resulting form in the Inland dialect is *tazyu* rather than *tezyu*.

(1.4a) Nondalton

Tazyu.

t-      z-      yu  
IP-    IPF-    walk

'S/he started to walk.'

---

<sup>2</sup> There are four imperfective and four perfective markers: *gb-*, *ʒ-*, *n-* and unmarked. See Tenenbaum (1978:90f.) and Kari (1976) for a description of this system. In the glosses, only the labels 'imperfective' and 'perfective' will be used.

(1.4b) Upper Inlet

Tayyu.

t-      y-      yu  
IP-    IPF-    walk

‘S/he started to walk.’

Note that even in the Upper Inlet dialect, the z-imperfective triggers vowel lowering, even if the morpheme has not the form [z-].

/z/ also becomes /y/ in Upper Inlet Dena’ina if it is part of a stem, not only in the aspectual morphemes. Observe (1.5):

(1.5a) Inland

vezaga

v-                      zaga  
B.Poss-                stamina

‘his/her stamina’

(1.5b) Upper Inlet

beyaga

b-                      yaga  
B.Poss-                stamina

‘his/her stamina’

There are countless lexical differences between each of the dialects, e.g. the word for ‘raven’ is *chulyin* in Inland Dena’ina, while it is *delgga* in the Upper Inlet dialect (Kari 1994:24). In this case, different are roots used; in other cases, the words are clearly recognizable as cognate, as for example the particle ‘and’: *ch’u* or *ts’u*<sup>3</sup> in Upper Inland Dena’ina, *ch’q’u* or *ch’tuq’u* Inland Dena’ina. As all examples will be carefully glossed, these lexical differences will not be discussed in great detail here.

## 1.2 Phonology

In this section, I will illustrate the phonemic inventory of Dena’ina. In the preceding section, the main dialectal variations with respect to the phonology have

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<sup>3</sup> This depends on the spelling system used. Up to 1985, Upper Inlet the alveo-palatal affricates and fricatives were written like the alveolar affricates and fricatives to reflect the nivellation of this distinction. In the last years, though, with revitalization efforts going on, it was decided to consolidate the spelling system and write Upper Inlet words the way Inland words are written. However, none such measures have been taken for the /z/~ /y/ problem.

already been mentioned. The table below illustrates the consonant inventory of Inland Dena’ina. Remember that the alveolar and alveo-palatal affricate and fricative rows have been collapsed in the Upper Inlet dialect. The affected areas are grey shaded.

		lab.	alveolar			alv-pal.	vel.	uvul.	glott
<b>stops</b>	pl.	p (b)	t (d)	ʃ (dl)	ʒ (dz)	ʒ̣ (j)	k (g)	g (gg)	ʔ (’)
	asp.		t <sup>h</sup> (t)	ʃ <sup>h</sup> (tl)	c <sup>h</sup> (ts)	tʃ <sup>h</sup> (ch)	k <sup>h</sup> (k)	q (q)	
	ej.		t’ (t’)	ʃ’ (tl’)	c’ (ts’)	tʃ’ (ch’)	k’ (k’)	q’ (q’)	
<b>fric.</b>	-v			l (l)	z (z)	ʒ̣ (zh)	j (y)	ʁ (gh)	
	+v			ɬ (ɬ)	s (s)	ʃ (sh)	x (x)	χ (h)	h (hh)
<b>son.</b>		m (m)	n (n)			y (y)			

Table 1.1: The consonantal system of Inland Dena’ina, adapted from Tenenbaum (1978:26)<sup>4</sup>

Note that in Table 1.1, both the phonemic and the orthographic representation of each sound is presented. This orthographic representation follows the orthography developed by Krauss and Kari in 1974 and is shown in brackets in the table.

The same representation system is used to display the vowel inventory of Dena’ina in Table 1.2. Note that this inventory is very small, and many Proto-Athabascan distinctions such as quality, length, nasalization, or tone are not phonemic in Dena’ina. Note that /ə/ is also the epenthetic vowel.

	front	central	back
high	i (i)		u (u)
mid		ə (e)	
low		a (a)	

Table 1.2: The vowel system of Dena’ina

For the understanding of this study, no further discussion of Dena’ina phonology is needed. Examples will be glossed carefully, so knowledge of the various

<sup>4</sup> The abbreviations are (top to bottom, left to right): fric.: fricatives, son.: sonorants, pl.: plain, asp.: aspirated, ej.: ejective, -v: voiceless, +v: voiced, lab.: labial, alv-pal.: alveo-palatal, vel.: velar, uvul.: uvular, glott.: glottal.

morphophonological processes at work is not necessary.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3 Word classes and morphology

Dena'ina being a polysynthetic language, it is only to be expected that its verb morphology is incredibly complex. This is true, and an excellent study of this can be found in Tenenbaum (1978). In this context, I will be less detailed with respect to verbal morphology, but will investigate some features of the other word classes in Dena'ina, something that has been neglected so far.

There are five word classes in Dena'ina: verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives and particles.

#### 1.3.1 Verbs

The verb is by far the most complex part of speech in Dena'ina. The basic unit of a verb is the *verb theme*. It consists of a verb stem plus various derivational, also called lexical-thematic, prefixes. This complex is inflected for person, number, tense, aspect and mode. Also, both nominal and adverbial incorporation are possible.

Throughout the rest of this study, the term 'verb theme' will be used to refer to the *uninflected* complex of stem set<sup>6</sup>, voice-/valence-marker, and lexical-thematic prefixes. The term 'verb word', on the other hand, will refer to the *inflected* verb theme. As there are no infinite verb forms in Dena'ina, the verb theme is also the citation form in a lexicon entry. A verb theme is an abstract entity designed for the use of linguists, while the verb word is a real-world thing.

The Dena'ina verb can be described as having a templatic structure<sup>7</sup>, as shown in Table 1.3. Some of the more common morphemes in the slots of the template will be illustrated in the following sections.

Each verb consists minimally of a verb stem (inflected for aspect), a voice-valence marker, a subject marker (either of position 4 or of position 12), and a mode marker. Perfective verbs also have to have the perfective morpheme in position 3, negative verbs have to contain the negative marker. The other morphemes are obligatory for particular verb themes (cf. 1.3.1.2 below).

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<sup>5</sup> Tenenbaum (1978) contains a very extensive section these processes that might be interesting to some readers.

<sup>6</sup> This term will be explained in 1.3.1 below.

<sup>7</sup> It will be shown in this study that this template does not describe the structure of the Dena'ina verb accurately. A revised version of what is labeled positions 12 and 13 can be found in chapter 6.1.2.

	Pos.	Abbr.	Meaning	Category
Disjunct Zone	19	OO	oblique/postpositional object	person & number
	18	PP	postposition	lexical-thematic
	17	AD	adverbial	lexical-thematic
	16	It	iterative	TMA
	15	Inc	incorporate	lexical-thematic
	14	Dist	distributive plural	lexical-thematic /person & number
# Disjunct Boundary #				
Conjunct Zone	13	DO	direct object	person & number
	12	OS	outer subject	person & number
	11	Qual	thematic prefix <i>q-</i> in the theme 'speak'	qualifier
	10	Con	conative, semitransitive	qualifier
	9	Ip	inceptive	TMA/qualifier
	8	Gen	gender prefixes	qualifier
	7	Neg	negative conjugation marker	TMA
	6	Qual	thematic prefixes	qualifier
	5	S	semelfactive, transitional	TMA
	4	M	mode (imperfective, perfective, future/progressive, optative)	TMA
	3	Pf	perfective marker <i>i-</i>	TMA
	2	IS	inner (personal) subject	person & number
	1	VV	voice/valence marker	lexical-thematic
	0	St	verb stem	lexical-thematic

Table 1.3: The structure of the Dena'ina verb

The terms disjunct and conjunct zone refer to the fact that there are several differences between affixes in these zones. Different sets of phonological rules apply to each of these zones, and affixes of the disjunct zone generally have a phonologically more elaborate form. Prefixes of the conjunct zone are more fused with each other, resulting in portmanteau morphemes and metathesis. Prefixes of the disjunct zone, on the other hand, are less tightly bound to each other and to the verb word (note that at least one complex of the disjunct zone, the inflected postposition, may occur without an verb). The disjunct boundary merely divides these prefix zones from each other. See footnote 10 under 1.3.1.2 for the notation of conjunct and disjunct prefixes.

#### 1.3.1.1 *The verb stem*

As indicated in Table 1.3, the verb stem occurs to the right of the verb word. The stem is always monosyllabic and has the shape CV(C). There seem to be no restrictions on the initial and final consonants.

In all Athabascan languages, and Dena'ina does not constitute an exception, stems are marked for mode and aspect; thus, the perfective stem of 'plural object moves' is *datl'*, the imperfective one is *dat*, the progressive one is *det*, and the optative one is *dat*. These and other related stems form what is called a *stem set*. Usually, the stems of one stem set are phonologically related (Tenenbaum 1978:40). Hoijer (1938 [1980]:77) states for Apache that there are rarely more than eight stems in a stem set. This is probably also true for Dena'ina, although an extensive study of aspect in this language still remains to be done.

#### 1.3.1.2 *Derivational morphology*

The derivational morphemes together with the verb stem form the *verb theme* of the verb, that is, the unit, to which inflectional morphology applies. There are two types of derivational morphemes: the qualifiers (in positions 6 to 8 and 11) and the lexical-thematic prefixes of positions 15, 17 and 18. The qualifiers are strongly lexicalized and do not significantly add to or modify the meaning of the verb theme. A good example of qualifiers are the gender prefixes, which together with classificatory verb stems constitute the nominal classification system of Dena'ina.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We will return to the gender system in chapter 5.

(1.6) Gender markers of position 8 (Tenenbaum 1978:143)

(a) Angga ghe'uł.

angga Ø- ghe'uł  
ball GEN- carry

'He's carrying a ball.'

(b) K'ghazha du'uł.

k'ghazha d- ghe'uł  
egg GEN- carry

'He's carrying an egg.'

(c) Giga nu'uł.

giga n- ghe'uł  
berry GEN- carry

'He's carrying a berry.'

(d) Qałnigi dnu'uł

qałnigi dn- ghe'uł  
rock GEN- carry

'He's carrying a rock.'

Tenenbaum (1978:160) also mentions a thematic prefix in position 11, which only occurs in the verb theme *q+nax* 'speak'. The theme never occurs without this *q-*. Example (1.7) shows a form of this theme.

(1.7) qenax

q- nax  
Qual- speak

's/he spoke'

Position 15 is reserved for incorporates. Some incorporates occur in lexicalized contexts; a good example for this is the one presented in (1.8), where the verb theme obligatorily contains the incorporate.

(1.8a) *sheł* 'speed'

(1.8b) *sheł#d+(n-Ipf, n-PF-)Ø+tuk* 'arrive running'

shełdanıłtuk'  
sheł- danıłtuk'  
run- arrive.running

's/he arrived running'

In (1.9a-f), I demonstrate how various thematic prefixes are used to modify the meaning of the verb stem *nike* 'go by boat'. The form of the following examples (1.9)

'prefix complexes of *nik* 'go by boat' are structured like this: The first line gives the lexicon entry<sup>2</sup>, the second the fully inflected verb form, the third the morpheme analysis, the fourth the gloss of the various morphemes, the fifth the position class number of each morpheme. Line six finally is a gloss of the verb form.

(1.9) prefix complexes of *nik* 'go by boat'<sup>3</sup>

(a) *gb+(Ø-IPF/ ẓ-PF-)+Ø+nik* 'go by boat'

ch'ghaynik

ch'-	gh-	z-	nik
CH'-	GEN-	PF-	go.by.boat
12-	8-	4-	0

'we went there by boat'

(b) *nu#gb+(Ø-IPF- / ẓ-PF-)+Ø+nik* 'travel around by boat'

nughunex

nu-	gh-	gh-	nex
around-	GEN-	PROG-	go.by.boat.PROG
16-	8-	4-	0

'he was boating around'

(c) *niqa#gb+(n-IPF/ n-PF- +)Ø+nik* 'land a boat'

niqaghaninik

niqa-	gh-	n-	i-	nik
to.beach-	GEN-	PF-	PF-	go.by.boat
17-	8-	4-	3-	0

'he landed his boat'

(d) *nik'u#gb+(Ø-IPF/ Ø-PF- +)D+nik* 'set out again by boat'

nik'unuch'ghatnik

nik'u-	nu-	ch'-	gh-	d-	nik
out.horizontally-	ITER-	CH'-	GEN-	VV-	go.by.boat
17-	16-	12-	8-	1-	0

'we set out again in the boat'

<sup>2</sup> A lexicon entry of a Dena'ina verb theme consists of the following parts (left to right): all thematic prefixes ordered according to the template, objects, the form of the imperfective and perfective modes, the voice and valence-marker and the verb stem (ideally, the stem set).

<sup>3</sup> The notation in the examples is as follows: The order of the prefixes is iconic left to right. Morphemes of the conjunct zone are divided by +, morphemes of the disjunct zone by #. A word boundary, as between non-incorporated postposition and verb, is indicated by ##.

(e) *ni#gh+(Ø-IPF/gh-PF-+ )Ø+nik* ‘arrive by boat’

nits’ghaghinik

ni-	ch’-	gh-	gh-	i-	nik
up.to-	CH’-	GEN-	PF-	PF-	go.by.boat
17-	12-	8-	4-	3-	0

‘we arrived by boat’

(f) *P-t’uy###d+gh+(Ø-IPF-/z-PF-+ )Ø+nik* ‘go by boat, meeting O’

qevt’uy dghunexna

qev-	t’uy		d-	gh-	gh-	nex		-na
QBO-	meeting.from.ahead		GEN-	GEN-	PROG-	go.by.boat.PROG		-REL
19-	18		8-	8-	4-	0		-SFX

‘the boaters that were meeting them from ahead’

The examples above illustrate how the meaning of a verb stem is modified by derivational prefixes. Note also that most prefixes of position 17 trigger a certain modal paradigm. *niqua-* ‘to beach’ (in (1.9c)), for example, always takes the n-imperfective and the n-perfective, while *niqua-* ‘around’ (cf. (1.10)) takes the Ø-imperfective and z-perfective.<sup>4</sup>

(1.10) *niqua#d+n+gh+(Ø-IPF/z-PF-) L+yes* ‘fly around’

niqatnulyes.

niqua-		d-	n-	gh-	l-	yes
around-		GEN-	GEN-	PROG-	VV-	turn.clockwise.PROG
17-		8-	8-	8-	1-	0

‘it flew around’

If several morphemes of position 17 occur within the same verb form, as in (1.11a), or if inceptive *t-* shows up with true inceptive (and not future) meaning, as in (1.11b), the morpheme closest to the verb stem determines the modal paradigm:

(1.11a) *nu+tsi#gh+n+(Ø-IPF-/gh-PF-) L+kit* ‘swim across’

nutsighighelkitch’

nu-	tsi-	gh-	n-	gh-	esh-	l-	kit	-ch’
across-	head-	GEN-	GEN-	PF-	1SG.S-	VV-	swim	-REL
17-	15-	8-	8-	4-	2-	1-	0	-Sfx

‘a way for me to swim across’

<sup>4</sup> Some of the prefixes of position 17, as *tsi-* ‘death, sickness’ do not have any impact on modal inflection.

(1.11b) *P eł##ta#k'*+*t*+(*z*-IPF/*z*-PF-)Ø+*qats'* 'start to sink'

qubeł tak'tayqats'						
qub-	eł	ta-	k'-	t-	z-	qats'
QBO-	to	under.water-	K'-	IP-	PF-	move
19-	18	17-	12-	9-	4-	0

to them            it moved them under water (they started to sink)

*nu-* 'across' of position 17 in (11a), not to be confused with *nu-* iterative of position 16, takes the *n*-imperfective and *n*-perfective. Contrary to that, the incorporate *tsi-* 'swim', also position 17, triggers the Ø-imperfective and the *gb*-perfective, which is the modal paradigm displayed in (11a).

In (11b), thematic *ta-* 'under water' combines with *t-* inceptive. *ta-* triggers the *n*-imperfective and *n*-perfective. Inceptive *t-*, on the other hand, always takes the *z*-modes, so the whole verb word is inflected in the *z*-perfective.

From this albeit brief overview, it becomes clear that Dena'ina is very rich in derivational morphology. A systematic study of this phenomenon yet remains to be done.

### 1.3.1.3 Inflection for tense, mode and aspect

Dena'ina has a very intricate modal and aspectual system.<sup>5</sup> Again, this is not one of the topics that have been discussed in any detail for this language. The only extensive study of aspect and mode in any Alaskan Athabaskan language has been done by Axelrod (1990), for Koyukon.

Aspect is marked in the verb stem and by the interaction of various prefixes (e.g. the conative or the transitional). However, I do not have enough systematic data to attempt an explanation, or even a good illustration, of this system at this point. Tenenbaum (1978:44f.) shows some examples of stem aspects. A systematic study remains to be done.

Mode is marked in the stem and in positions 3 and 4. Position 4 is filled by one of several perfective and imperfective markers, and by the progressive and the optative morpheme.

(1.12) *ghash/ghach* 'bite' (Kari 1976)

(a) *n*-imperfective

Ba neshdeghash.						
b-	a	n-	esh-	d-	ghash	
BO-	through	IPF-	1SG.S-	VV-	bite	

'I bite through it.'

<sup>5</sup> There is only one tense, which will be discussed with the modal markers.

(b) *n*-perfective

Ba neshdghach.

b-	a	n-	i-	esh-	d-	ghach
BO-	through	P <sub>F</sub> -	P <sub>F</sub> -	1SG.S-	VV-	bite

‘I bit through it.’<sup>6</sup>

Position 3 is filled by the morpheme *i*<sup>7</sup>, which in some paradigms combines with the *gh*- and *n*-perfective modal markers of position 4 to form the *gh*- and *n*-perfective (cf. Hargus & Tuttle 1997).

The negative marker *ɣ*- is also part of the aspectual/modal inflection. Note that negation is marked not in position 4 or 3, but in position 7. Polarity cross-cuts the modal system. See (1.13) for an example of negative *ɣ*- in a future verb form:

(1.13a) positive imperfective

q’atigheshesnul						
q’a-	t-	ghi-	gh-	esh-	d-	nul
LEX-	IP-	QUAL-	PROG-	1SG.S-	D-	quit.work

‘I will quit working’

(1.13b) negative imperfective

nch’u	q’atighizgheshesnul							
nch’u	q’a-	t-	ghi-	z-	gh-	esh-	d-	nul
not	LEX-	IP-	QUAL-	NEG-	PROG-	1SG.S-	D-	quit.work

‘I will not quit working’

The inceptive morpheme of position 8 expresses that an action has just been started; together with the *gh*-progressive marker of position 4 and a progressive stem it forms the future tense. The conative morpheme in position 9 encodes the meaning ‘to try to do X’. Finally, the iterative morpheme of position 16 (and illustrated in (11a) above) can be regarded to belong to the modal and aspectual complex of the verb.

This extremely short section has not done justice to the intricacies of the modal and aspectual system of Dena’ina. The complexity of the system, as well as the fact that this kind of inflection is irrelevant to the topic of this study, must suffice as an explanation for this negligence.

#### 1.3.1.4 Inflection for person and number

For the greater part, both person and number in Dena’ina are expressed by pronominal prefixes. For a discussion of the pronominal inventory, as well as of the

<sup>6</sup> The translation is not exact. But there seems to be no better way to express the difference between the perfective and imperfective mode.

<sup>7</sup> Perfective *i*- is deleted before *l*- and *ʔ*- VV-marker and before *esh*- ‘first person singular’ and *eh*- ‘second person plural’ (Tenenbaum 1978:91).

form and function of various pronominal affixes, I refer the reader to Chapter 2.

While person can only be expressed by pronominals, number may be expressed in several places within the verb word. Not only are some of the pronouns marked for number (again, this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2), but number distinctions may be marked in the verb stem, by the distributive plural morpheme *n-* in position 14, and even by the iterative morpheme. Each of these cases will be illustrated briefly.

(1.14a) *ghinyuł*

gh- n- yuł  
PROG- 2SG.S- move.SG  
'you (singular) are walking'

(1.14b) *ihyuł*

gh- eh- yuł  
PROG- 2PL.S move.SG  
'you (dual) are walking'

(1.14c) *ihdeł*

gh- eh- deł  
PROG- 2PL.S- move.PL  
'you (plural) are walking'

(1.14d) \**ghindeł*

gh- n- deł  
PROG- 2SG.S- move.PL

(1.14a) and (1.14b) differ with respect to pronominal inflection: In (1.14a), a singular pronominal is used, in (1.14b), the pronominal indicates non-singular. Note that (1.14b) is restricted to a dual reading. Plural – more than two – is expressed by (1.14c), where the plural verb stem *deł* is inflected for a non-singular subject.<sup>8</sup> The form *ghindeł* in (1.14d), with a non-singular verb stem and a singular subject prefix, is not permitted.

This shows not only that verb stems can indicate number.<sup>9</sup> It also shows that in these cases, Dena'ina does not have a two-way number distinction – singular versus plural – but that the combination of pronominal prefixes and number-marked verb stems can result in a three-way number distinction, with singular, dual and

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<sup>8</sup> There are cases where the form *qudeł* (*q- gh- deł*) has a dual instead of a plural reading (cf. The Hunting Dog). The reasons for this are not quite clear.

<sup>9</sup> They can indicate number of the subject of an intransitive verb, as in example (14) above, or they can indicate the number of the object of a transitive verb.

plural.

Another means of expressing number distinctions is the *n*- distributive marker. This marker distinguishes distributive actions, where everybody is doing the same thing but separately, from collective actions, where a group of people is doing something together. Compare (1.15):

(1.15a) Collective action

Ch'edał.

ch'- dał

CH'- move.PL

'We (as a group) were going.'

(1.15b) Distributive action (Pete 2003:164)

Ighi dora ghini bet'ila eł nch'edał ighi.

ighi	dora	ghini	bet'ila eł	n-	ch'-	dał	ighi	
well	dory	this	its rope	with	DIST-	CH'-	move.PL	well
well	this dory		with a rope		we	traveled		well

'We were going with a dory by tracking rope.'

(1.15a) is the unmarked form, with the meaning 'we traveled as a group'. (1.15b), on the other hand, is much more specific with regard to the mode of traveling: *dora ghini bet'ila eł* 'by means of the rope of this dory'. The distributive plural marker indicates that several people took turns with the rope-tracking, thus distributing the action over all of them.

One verb class where distributives are very common is the class of adjectival verbs<sup>10</sup>. Adjectival verbs in the singular and dual contain a neuter morpheme *d-* and a *gb-* imperfective, as shown in (1.16). In the plural forms the *gb-* imperfective disappears, and instead, an *n-* distributive is used.

(1.16) *n*- distributive

(a) Inland; Al. Evan (1976:18)

dghishin

d- ghi- shin

NEUT- IPF-- be.pretty

's/he is pretty'

<sup>10</sup> Adjectival verbs are intransitive verbs expressing properties. They are characterized by special morphology: the neuter marker *d-* of position 17, the *gb-*(im)perfective and the  $\emptyset$ - VV-marker.

(b) Inland; Tenenbaum (1978:160)

denqeshin  
d-    *n*-    q-    shin  
NEUT- DIST- QS-    be.pretty  
'they are pretty'

The use of nominal number (to be discussed under 1.3.2) as well as most kinds of verbal number are restricted to human or at least animate referents (see Corbett 2000 for a typological view on the interaction of the animacy hierarchy and number marking). The distributive, however, can also be used if the referent is not animate.

Thus, number can be expressed in the verb stem, by pronominal prefixes and by means of the *n*- distributive marker. It should be pointed out that number is not always an obligatory category. Number has to be expressed if the non-singular referent is human, and it may be expressed with animals. Inanimate entities do not co-occur with non-singular verb morphology.

#### 1.3.1.5 Suffixes/Enclitics

Apart from the verbal prefixes described in sections 1.3.1.1-1.3.1.4, there are also several suffixes and/or enclitics<sup>11</sup>, expressing intention, negation and relativization. As all my examples are glossed carefully, I will not be concerned with the intentional and negative enclitics. Relativizers occur with great frequency in Dena'ina natural speech, and as they are an important means of constructing complex sentences, they will be briefly illustrated in the following examples. There are five of them:

(1.17) *-en/-nen* 'human singular' Upper Inlet; Pete (1975:1)

Diqelas Tukda heyel dghinihen ...  
Diqelas Tukda                    heyel                    dghinih                    *-en*  
Diqelas Tukda                    they.to.him    say                    -REL  
Diqelas Tukda                    the one they called  
'The one they called Diqelas Tukda ...'

(1.18) *-na* 'human plural' (An. Evan 1976b:47)

Yada qut'ana dugu negh dagheshyuni shełnina, ...  
yada                    qut'ana                    dugu                    negh    dagheshyuni  
whatever            people                    it.was                    to you I want to go in  
whichever person it was                    I want to get in with you

<sup>11</sup> Some morphemes, like the relative markers, are clearly suffixes, while other morphemes, like the negative imperative markers, are rather enclitics. There are also cases – like the optative *-ni* – where both analyses are possible. Enclitics and suffixes will be treated together, as the discussion of which morpheme falls into which category is beyond the aim of this study.

shełni            -na  
 say.to.me        -REL  
 the ones that said to me

‘No matter which person said to me ‘let me get in with you’, ...’

(1.19) -i/-ye ‘nonanimate’ (Pete 1996:2)

Ey’uh nughełeshi ggagga heyel dghinihi ...

ey’uh	nughełeshi	ggagga	qeyel	dghinih	-i
game.animal		brown.bear	they.to.him	say	-REL
game animal		brown bear	the one they call		

‘The game animal that they call *ggagga*...’

(1.20) -cb’ ‘the way to do X’ (Kari n.d.)

Ch’q’u ghu t’qel dghinich’ t’ehyiluq ha’.

ch’q’u	ghu	t’qel dghini	-cb’	t’ehyiluq	ha’
and	then	he.told.them	-REL	they.did.it	EMPH
and	then	the way he had told them		they did it	EMPH

‘They did it the way he had told them.’

(1.21) -t ‘the place that..., the time that...’; Kari (n.d.)

ka’eya łchuna	qu	t’deshnit	
ka’eya łchuna	qu	t’deshni	-t
damn shit	now	I.say.thus	-REL
damn shit		that I say that	

‘damn, oh shit that I’m saying that’

Note that the relativizing suffixes differ as to their functions. For one thing, there are different relativizers for human and non-human referents, and within the category of human referents, the relativizers also reflect a difference in number.<sup>12</sup>

There is also an abstract relativizer expressing ‘a way to do X’, exemplified by (1.20), and a positional relativizer meaning ‘a place where X’, shown in (1.21).

This discussion of Dena’ina verb morphology could merely touch upon some of the more important issues, and they have not received the notice and detailed discussion they deserve. For additional information on Dena’ina verb morphology and on the classificatory system that was only briefly mentioned, I refer the reader to the excellent study of Tenenbaum (1978).

### 1.3.2 Nouns and noun phrases

In a language that is both head-marking and polysynthetic, it is not surprising that the nominal morphology is not nearly as complex as the verbal morphology. Still,

<sup>12</sup> This pattern will recur again and again throughout this study.

Dena'ina nouns can be inflected for possessor and sometimes for number. Noun phrases, furthermore, are surprisingly complex, as Dena'ina makes extensive use of its demonstrative system.

We will begin by illustrating possessor marking. The discussion will stay brief as we will return to possessor marking several more times. The section after that will be dedicated to nominal number marking, while the last section is concerned with the use of demonstratives.

Possession in Dena'ina can be marked by one of a set of possessive prefixes and, in some cases, by the possessive suffix. Dena'ina nouns fall into classes with respect to possession: Some nouns, especially kinship nouns and nouns referring to body parts, are obligatorily possessed, while others are not. Obligatorily possessed nouns may not appear without a possessive prefix. If the possessor is unknown, the indefinite possessor prefix *k'* is chosen.

The possessive prefixes are formally nearly identical to the object prefixes and will be discussed more extensively in chapters 2 and 3. If a noun is possessed, it always has a possessive prefix in the appropriate person and number. The possessive suffix, on the other hand, is not used with all noun stems. It has the shape *-a* or *-'a*. In (1.21), possession is illustrated for the nouns *tuqesi* 'fish spear' and *ghudeni* 'advice, lesson':

(1.21a) possession with possessive suffix: *tuqesi* 'fish spear'

shtuqesa  
 sh-            tuqesi            -a<sup>13</sup>  
 1SG.POSS-    fish.spear        -SFX  
 'my fish spear'

(1.21b) possession without possessive suffix: *ghuduni* 'advice, lesson'

shghuduni<sup>14</sup>  
 sh-            ghuduni  
 1SG.POSS-    advice  
 'my lesson'

To further complicate the situation, there are words that may or may not occur with the possessive suffix. This does not depend on the dialect or on the speaker; in one

<sup>13</sup> The possessive suffix has the form *-a* in the Inland and Upper Inlet dialects, *-'a* elsewhere. If the possessive suffix immediately follows a stem vowel, the stem vowel is deleted.

<sup>14</sup> In Kari (1994:248) the possessed form is cited as *veghutni* 'his advice, lesson'. This may be a dialectal difference; *veghutni* is in the Inland dialect, while the form in (21b) is in the Upper Inlet dialect. But even though the possessed form differs from the unpossessed one in the Inland dialect, the difference does not lie in the presence or absence of the possessive suffix, but in other morphological processes.

text (Diqelas Tukda), the obligatorily possessed noun *'iyi* 'name' occurs twice with the possessive suffix and twice without. Observe (1.22):

(1.22a) *'iyi* without possessive suffix (Pete 1977:24)

"Iyni ełnen qeq'uhghitunen" be'yiyi k'ghila.

iyni	ełnen	qeq'uhghitun	-en	b-	'iyi
guns	country	bring.LRO	-REL		B.POSS name
guns	country	the one who introduced them			his name
k'ghila					
be					
it was					

'His name was "He who introduced guns to the country".'

(1.22b) *'iyi* with possessive suffix (Pete 1977:6)

Yink'a u'iyia qit'a'idesni.

yin	-k'a	b-	'iyi	-a	qit'a'ideshni
she	-too	B.POSS-	name	-POSS.SFX	I.know
she	-too	her name			I know

'I know her name too.'

Nothing springs to mind that would explain the variation in (1.22). The same noun stem may be possessed with and without a possessive suffix, without there being a perceptible meaning difference. Note also that two allomorphs of the *b-* possessor exist, [u-] and [b-] in the Upper Inlet dialect. As they occur with the same noun stem, a phonological explanation of the allomorphy is not possible.

Most of the possessor prefixes are homonymous to the object prefixes discussed above. The exception is the reflexive possessor prefix *d-* that differs from the reflexive object prefix *hu-*. In (1.23), both the reflexive object *hu-* and the reflexive possessive marker *d-* occur:

(1.23) Reflexive *hu-* and reflexive *d-* (Al. Evan 1976:18)

Q'u ki q'u shtunu'idyu ye eła hugh danayulghel ts'itt'an de'u ghun.

q'u ki q'u	shtunu'idyu	ye eła	<i>hu-</i>	gh
and.now	go.hunting	and	REFL.O-	with
and now	he went hunting	and	with himself	
danayulghel		ts'itt'an	<i>d-</i>	'u ghun
handle.SAO		one	REFL.POSS-	wife that
he brought her along		one	his own wife	that

'One day Raven went out hunting and took along his one wife (and not the other).'

The reflexive possessor prefix is used when the possessor and the subject of the clause are co-referential, just as the *hu-* object prefix has to be co-referential with the subject of the clause. Apart from this exception, the possessor markers are identical to the object prefixes.

We have seen that there are several unresolved issues with respect to possession in Dena'ina. The main questions are: which nouns are obligatorily possessed and which ones are not, which ones take the possessive suffix and which ones do not, and finally, how to explain the vocalic allomorph of the third person singular possessor *b-*, [u]. A detailed study of these and other related problems in Dena'ina remains yet to be done.

Dena'ina nouns are typically unspecified as to number. Thus, the sentence in (1.24) is ambiguous. We have seen in the preceding sections that verbal morphology may be used to mark the participants for number, but again, number is in most cases not an obligatory category.

(1.24) Qunsha gheshe'an.

qunsha	gh-	esh-	'an
ground.squirrel	PF-	1SG.S-	see
ground squirrel	I	see	
i. 'I see a ground squirrel.'			
ii. 'I see ground squirrels.'			

Although most nouns are not inflected for number, the relativizing enclitic *-na* is used to express non-singular with nouns referring to persons, cf.:

(1.25) Upper Inlet

dek'isen	'woman'
dek'isna	'women'

This suffix also takes the shape *'ina*, as in the noun Dena'ina 'the people'. Another nominal plural marker is the morpheme *-qa*. The form of the plural marker is determined lexically; *dek'isen* takes the plural marker *-na*, the word for 'dog', *tik'a*, takes *-qa*. Holton, Kari and Müller (2004:15) also note that there are dialectal differences; the word *t'ada* 'teenage girl' takes the plural marker *-na* in the Upper Inlet dialect (resulting in the form *t'ada'ina* 'teenage girls', while it takes *-qa* in the Inland dialect, resulting in the form *t'atqa* 'teenage girls'. A systematic study of this remains to be done.

Note that all nouns where a plural can be formed refer to either human beings or dogs. Other nouns do not have a plural form.

### 1.3.5 Pronouns

In Kari's (1994) Topical Dictionary, he lists two classes of pronouns: personal pronouns and demonstrative pronouns. There is some discussion as to whether demonstratives really are pronouns or possibly rather a category in themselves (cf. Vater 1986, Sasse 1993 for some views on this question). This problem will not be resolved here. I do want to point out, though, that the demonstratives, or possibly rather determiners in Dena'ina do not have many pronominal features. This results in a rather incongruous descriptive approach: The category will be called determiners (rather than demonstrative pronouns), but they will be treated in the section about pronouns.

Personal pronouns are true pronouns in the sense that they can stand for an NP. In Kari (1994:51), they are subdivided into independent and dependent pronouns. In the present study, Kari's dependent pronouns are called pronominal prefixes (they will be discussed in chapter 2), while his 'independent pronouns' will be called 'free pronouns'. An inventory of the class of free pronouns is shown in Table 1.4<sup>15</sup>:

	singular	plural
1	shi	nayi
2	nen	nhin
3 animate	yin, yinen	yina
3 inanimate	vi	
reflexive	udi	qudi

Table 1.4: Free personal pronouns. Adapted from Kari (1994:51)

As Saxon (1986) has shown for Dogrib, the free pronouns are used predominantly in contrastive or topical constructions, mainly because each verb form has to be inflected for subject and object.<sup>16</sup> A typical use of a Dena'ina personal pronoun is shown in (26):

(1.26a) Topical reading (An. Evan 1976b:44)

“Shi, negh dagheshyuni,” yełni łu.

<i>shi</i>	negh	dagheshyuni	yełni	łu
1SG	with.you	I.want.to.go.in	say	it.is.said
I	with you	I want to get in	he said to him	it is said

“Me, I want to ride with you,” [the moose] said to him.

<sup>15</sup> The free pronouns are displayed in the form of the Nondalton dialect.

<sup>16</sup> This claim will have to be modified later on.

(1.26b) Contrastive reading (Delkittie 1976:61))

Nini gun, “Ugha, hk’u shiniłt’uh,” yełni łu.

nini	gun	ugha	hk’u		
porcupine	that	come.on	away		
that porcupine		go ahead	away		
sh-	in-	n-	łt’uh	yełni	łu
1SG.O-	LEX-	2SG.S-	throw.SAO	say	it is said
you throw me down				he said to him	it is said

‘The porcupine said, “Come on, throw me away.”’

‘Nen q’u hk’u nitighet’eh,” yełni łu.

<i>Nen</i>	q’u	hk’u	ni-	n-	tigh-	esh-	t’eh
2SG	now	away	down	2SG.O-	FUT-	1SG.S-	throw.SAO
you	now	away	I’ll throw you down				
yełni			łu				
3.say			it.is.said				
he said to him			it is said				

‘‘I’ll throw you away instead,’’ he said to him.’

In (1.26a), the topical use of a free pronoun is demonstrated. This example is taken from a Raven story, where Raven is boating around, asking whether anybody wants to ride with him. By use of the free pronoun *shi* ‘first person singular’, the moose indicates clearly that he wants to come along for the ride. The intonation of the utterance, which is reflected in the punctuation, suggests that *shi* is not really part of the clause *negh dagheshyuni* ‘I want to ride with you’, but occupies the topic position at the left edge of an utterance (see section 1.4.1 for more detail on topicalization).

The contrastive use of a free pronoun is illustrated in (1.26b). The Porcupine reacts to the threat of the Brown Bear in a similar way: It is not that the Porcupine that is going to be thrown off the tree, but that the Brown Bear is going to be thrown down instead. In contrastive constructions, the particle *q’u*, usually glossed as ‘now’, is used with great frequency.

Let us now look at the determiners. Table 1.5 gives a short overview of the forms of the determiners, but bear in mind that there may be some dialectal variation going on, so this table may be incomplete. The third column provides examples for the determiners.

		form	example	
[-human]	[-distal]	<i>gin(i)</i>	<i>tik'a gin</i> 'this dog'	
	[+distal]	<i>ghin(i)</i>	<i>tik'a ghin</i> 'that dog'	
[+human]	[-distal]	[-plural]	<i>gun(en)</i>	<i>qichi gunen</i> 'this old lady'
		[+plural]	<i>guna</i>	<i>qichiqa guna</i> 'these old ladies'
	[+distal]	[-plural]	<i>ghun(en)</i>	<i>qichi ghunen</i> 'that old lady'
		[+plural]	<i>ghuna</i>	<i>qichiqa ghuna</i> 'those old ladies'

Table 1.5: Determiners. Adapted from Kari (1994:51)

Several features are included in each of the determiners: They indicate whether a referent is human or not and whether a human referent is singular or non-singular. Also, they have a deictic meaning component, which is something usually found in demonstratives (see Lyons 1999:107ff.). This also implies that they are necessarily definite.

A more extensive study remains to be done, but so far, there are no examples of an indefinite NP consisting of a noun plus one of the determiners. NPs that contain a determiner are also definite. A typical example is (1.27):

(1.27a) NP without and with determiner (Nicolie 1976:1)

Qeshqa utsa'a "Ken ch'tudałni," ni.

qeshqa	utsa'a	ken	ch'tudałni	ni
rich.man	3.daughter	flats	we.go	say
rich man	his daughter	flats	let's go	she said

'One day a rich man's daughter said, "Let's go to the flats.'"

(...)

(1.27b) Qeshqa utsa'a ghun yech' niduhudalyu ch'u heyighetneq

qeshqa	utsa'a	ghun	yech'	niduhudalyu	ch'u	heyighetneq
rich.man	3.daughter	that	for.it	beg	and	take.3
the rich man's daughter		for it	she begged	and		they took it

'The rich man's daughter begged for it and they took it.'

In the stretch of text in (1.27), we see a nice example of a determiner adding definiteness to an NP. In the first utterance, a new referent is introduced into the story. New referents are usually not definite, as they are not identifiable to the listener (cf. Lyons 1999:3f.). The second time the rich man's daughter is mentioned in the present story, though, she is identifiable and thus definite. This is indicated by the presence of a determiner in the NP referring to her in example (1.27b).

Even though the determiners of Dena'ina are, especially in the light of their

persistence throughout natural speech as well as in elicited utterances, a fascinating topic, we cannot dedicate more space to them in the present study.

### 1.3.6 *Adjectives*

Dena'ina has a small, closed class of adjectives. This class includes but is not restricted to: *kda* 'old, weak', *gguya* 'little', *shla* 'little', *ka'a* 'big'. Thus, all of the adjectives belong to one of the subclasses (AGE, DIMENSION, VALUE and COLOUR) that usually belong to the adjective class, even if the latter is very small (Dixon 1983:46).

The question of the positioning of adjectives in the noun phrase will be addressed in 1.4.2.

### 1.3.7 *Particles*

The last word class to be mentioned is the class of particles. This class is a kind of a wastebasket category, where all words that are neither a noun, a pronoun, an adjective or a verb are grouped together – anything that can be inflected neither for possession nor for person or tense/aspect/mode and that cannot modify a noun is considered to be a particle. Consequently, the category comprises a rather disparate array of question markers, evidentiality markers, conjunctions, and adverbs of all kinds.

It would be too much to list even an abbreviated inventory of the class of particles. They occur everywhere in the texts, but as they are always glossed, it is not necessary to discuss them here in any detail. However, a study of at least the evidentiality markers is in preparation (cf. Holton and Müller 2005 for a preliminary account), and it may be hoped that some of the other particles will be included at a later point in time.

## 1.4 **Syntax**

Dena'ina syntax is a topic that is sadly underdescribed. Thus, the account here must be considered preliminary. It probably does not hold up to quantification or a detailed analysis. Instead, these are observations that stem from looking at texts, not isolated sentences.

### 1.4.1 *Word order and the need for overt noun phrases*

As most of the syntactic relations are expressed in the verb, Dena'ina syntax is not very rigid and allows for a lot of variation according to emphasis, relevance and so forth. Still, there are some tendencies about word order, which I briefly summarize.

The basic word order seems to be SOV, although this claim is hard to maintain for several reasons. For one thing, noun phrases do not have to appear in

every sentence, as all necessary syntactic and to some degree semantic information about the arguments is already encoded in the verb word. Thus, if all referents have been introduced into the discourse in a preceding utterance, a verb form can in itself constitute a complete sentence, without need for lexical arguments:

(1.28) NPs in discourse (Nicolie 1976:1)

(a) Ugguya baydu.

u-	gguya	baydu	
B.Poss-	little	sit.in.it	
his baby		it was sitting in it	

‘The baby crane was sitting in it.’

(b) Qeshqa utsa’a ghun yech’ niduhudalyu ch’u heyighetneq

qeshqa	utsa’a	ghun	yech’	niduhudalyu	ch’u	heyighetneq
rich.man	his.daughter	that	for.it	beg	and	take.O
rich man	his daughter	that	for it	she begged	and	they took it

‘The rich man’s daughter begged for it and they took it.’

(c) Ts’u nuytaltan.

ch’u	nu-	y-	Ø-	taltan
and	back-	YO-	ØS-	handle.SAO
and	she	brought	it	back

‘And she brought it back.’

The text example in (1.28) is taken from the opening section of the Crane Story. In (1.28a) and (1.28b), respectively, the baby crane and the rich man’s daughter are (re-) introduced into the discourse. In (1.28c), both of them are salient. Accordingly, the verb form in (1.28c) is co-indexed sufficiently clearly, without the need for additional overt NPs to clarify reference.

As sentences are rarely uttered out of context, reference in most cases is clear. Thus, NPs occur when there is a change of (subject) reference or when a referent has not been encoded by an NP in a long stretch of text. Because of this, there are rarely several NPs in one sentence. Even if a new referent is introduced, another one that has been introduced in a preceding sentence is still salient. This will be illustrated by an example:

(1.29) use of full NPs (An. Evan 1976a:14)

(a) Chulyin gun nudnulzex nudnulzex ch'q'u vejex egh dnalen.

chulyin	gun	nudnulzex	nudnulzex
raven	that.one	fly.around	fly.around
that raven		he was flying around	he was flying around

ch'q'u	vejex	egh	dnalen
and	caribou	by	fly
and	a caribou	by	he flew

Raven was flying around and flying around, and he flew by a caribou.

(b) Vejex nghiʔan.

vejex	nghiʔan
caribou	see
caribou	he saw

He saw a caribou.

In (1.29a), first Raven and then a Caribou are introduced into the discourse. But even though there is a full NP referring to Caribou both in (1.29a) and in (1.29b), Raven is still salient. Thus, he does not have to be re-introduced in (1.29b); it is still clear to listener and speaker that Raven is the agent of the verb form *nghiʔan*. All this results in that there is rarely more than one NP per clause. If, however, there are two overt NPs, the subject usually precedes the object. Observe (1.30):

(1.30) Upper Inlet; Pete (1989:3)

Niʔq'ena'ina ghuna tʔiʔ nuhuqudghun			
niʔq'ena'ina	ghuna	tʔiʔ	nuhuqudghun
brothers	these	rope	tie.around.self
S		O	V
those two brothers		rope	they tightened them

'The two brothers tightened their rope belts.'

The first position of the sentence is a topic position. If there is a full subject NP present, it is usually found in that position. Other items that can occupy the topic position are free pronouns, as we have seen in section 1.3.5 above, or other NPs.

(1.31) NP in topic position (An. Evan 1976a:14)

(a) K'inghildi ineya.

k'inghildi ineya  
 cranberry pick  
 cranberries he was picking

'He was picking cranberries.'

(b) K'inghildi ghin kut' daynalt'ech' ghu dghikugh gheli ch'q'u.

k'inghildi ghin kut' daynalt'ech' ghu  
 cranberry that pocket put.in there  
 those cranberries his pocket he filled up

dghikugh gheli ch'q'u  
 be.big really and  
 a lot really and

'He filled his pockets all over his body with cranberries.'

Because of the unagentiveness of cranberries, no subject NP co-referential to Raven is necessary for the listener to understand (1.31a). It is clear that the cranberries are being picked and not picking something else. The same is true in the following utterance (1.31b). Notice that the cranberries are still salient, which renders an explicit reference to them unnecessary. However, they are the topic of the utterance in (1.31b), and thus are mentioned in the topic position. In a very few cases, this topicalization of an object NP can result in the word order OSV. The intonation always suggests that the object NP is not really part of the clause, and that it has been left-dislocated into the topic position:

(1.32) left dislocation of NP (Pete 1989:3)

*K'kela ghunen* bingha bingha ghunen beyakah yuyul ch'u, ...

k'kela ghunen bingha bingha ghunen  
 y.brother this o.brother o.brother this  
 the younger brother his older brother his older brother

bekayah yuyul  
 in.front.of.O YS.go  
 in front of him he was going

'The younger brother, his older brother was going ahead of him...'

Another digression from the normal word order SOV is motivated by right dislocation, or afterthoughts. Observe the following example:

(1.33) postpositional object as afterthought (Pete 2003:168)

Bude q'u niɲnuch'eghutnik, naqeshqa ghun.

b-	ude	q'u	ninuch'eghutnik	naqesqa	ghun
3Sg.O-	without	now	we.returned	our.leader	that
	without him	now	we had returned		

'We had returned without him, without our leader.'

As can be seen in (1.33), the NP that is lexicalized as afterthought is already present in the argument structure of the verb, as pronominal argument of the postposition *ude* 'without'. This construction is not restricted to object NPs. (1.34) shows an example of a subject NP as afterthought:

(1.34) subject as afterthought (An. Evan 1976b:49)

"Aa'," yeɲni ɲu Chulyin gun.

aa'	y-	Ø-	ɲni	ɲu	Chulyin	gun
yes	YO-	ØS-	say	it.is.said	Raven	that
yes	he said to him		it is said	Raven	that	

"'Yes,'" Raven said to him.'

In (1.34), the subject NP *Chulyin gun* appears in utterance-final position. Note that it follows the sentence-final particle *ɲu* that marks an utterance as reported speech. This shows that the NP truly is right-dislocated into a position outside of the unmarked utterance.

#### 1.4.2 *The structure of complex noun phrases*

After the discussion of the general order of phrases in Dena'ina, a few words about the internal structure of complex NPs seem in order. It has been said above that there is a set of determiners that occur in nearly every definite NP. These determiners always follow their noun. Additionally, nouns may also be modified by a true adjective or by an adjectival verb. It is even possible for an adjective/adjectival verb and a determiner to co-occur. Unfortunately, there is no example with both an adjective and an adjectival verb in my corpus. All of the occurring constructions will be shown in (1.35) and (1.36), respectively:

(1.35a) adjective (Pete 1989:3)

Łik'akda nesh qubenyu.

łik'a -kda nesh qubenyu  
 dog -dear ahead follow.them  
 a dear dog ahead he followed them

'A dear dog followed them.'

(1.35b) adjective and determiner (Pete 1989:3)

(...) łik'a kda ghin qeyech' tudelggesh hnuq'u, (...).

<i>łik'a</i>	<i>kda</i>	<i>ghin</i>	<i>qeych'</i>	<i>tudelggesh</i>	<i>hnuq'u</i>
dog	dear	that	they.from.him	went	when
that dear dog			they got too far ahead of him		when

'(...) and when they got too far ahead of the dear dog, (...)'

(1.36a) adjectival verb (Delkittie 1976:61)

Q'uyehdi ch'vala daghiłkughi egh niyu.

q'uyehdi	ch'vala	d-	gh-	n-	łkugh	-i
then	spruce	NEUT-	IPF-	NEUT-	big	-REL
then	spruce				a big one	

egh niyu  
 to come  
 to he came

'Then he came to a big spruce.'

(1.36b) adjectival verb and determiner (Pete 2003:166)

Ch'bala dendałkeghi shi dendałkeghi ghini (...)

ch'bala	d-	n-	d-	łkegh	-i
spruce	NEUT-	DIST-	GEN-	big	-REL
spruce				big ones	

shi	d-	n-	d-	łkegh	-i	ghini
1SG	NEUT-	DIST-	GEN-	big	-REL	these
I				big ones		these

'Then [they used] big spruce, spruce as big as me (...)'

The evidence in (1.35) is quite clear: the adjective follows the noun, and the determiner in its turn follows the adjective. For adjectival verbs, the situation is not quite as unambiguous, as there are no good examples of noun, an adjectival verb and a determiner occurring within the same verb phrase.<sup>17</sup> (1.36b) is the best example I

<sup>17</sup> For some reason, there are several examples of a noun and an adjectival verb, or of an adjectival verb and a determiner, but the three of them rarely co-occur – possibly because of the resulting length of the NP.

could find, and in that utterance, the adjectival verb form is repeated. However, the word order is as expected.

### 1.4.3 Complex sentences

Of course, Dena'ina sentences do not always consist of one and only one clause. Contrariwise, a large percentage of utterances is very complex; for Shem Pete (admittedly the speaker with the most elaborate language), utterances with more than five verb forms are not rare. Compare (1.37) for a rather long one:

(1.37) complex sentence (Pete 1977:5)

Tets nuqudatl' ch'u daghiset ghu qayahdut'an sht'a nihninu ch'u hnayul ch'u yet hnuq'u heł stunuqidatl' ch'u hdunuqudatl' ch'u qit'aqiniyen.

tets	nuqudatl'	ch'u	daghiset	ghu	qayahdut'ant		
at.night	PL.travel	and	far	at	visible.place		
at night	they traveled	and	far away	at	at a lookout point		
st'a	nihninu	ch'u	hnayul	ch'u	yet	hnuq'u	
just	PL.stop	and	PL.make.camp	and	there	when	
just	they stopped	and	they made camp	and	there	when	
shtunuqidatl'	ch'u	hdunuqudatl'	ch'u	qit'aqiniyen			
PL.get.away	and	PL.escape	and	PL.know			
they got away and	they escaped	and	they knew it				

'They traveled at night, and when they got far away they stopped at a good lookout point and spent the night, then they knew that they had escaped.'

The complex sentence in (1.37) contains seven verb forms. Each of these verb forms is the center of a clause. Some of these clauses are coordinated by the particle *ch'u* 'and' (*ch'q'u* in the Inland dialect), others are part of other clauses. The verb forms connected by *ch'u* are *nuqudatl'* 'they traveled', *nihninu* 'they stopped' and *hnayul* 'they stopped'. The last three verb forms, *shtunuqidatl'* 'they got away', *hdunuqudatl'* 'they escaped' and *qit'aqiniyen* 'they knew it' also are coordinated by *ch'u*.

The two chains of verbs are connected by the sentence-final subordinating conjunction *hnuq'u* 'when'.<sup>18</sup> The verb form *daghiset* 'far away' seems to have more adverbial function than anything. The relativized form *qayahdut'ant* 'a place that is visible all around', however, functions as a noun. This kind of relativization is very common.

<sup>18</sup> All subordinating conjunctions in Dena'ina are clause-final.

We will conclude our brief note on Dena’ina sentence structure with a note on so-called ‘direct discourse complements’. All *verba dicendi et sentiendi* take a direct speech complement rather than a subordinated clause as their object. Observe (1.38):

(1.38) direct discourse complement (An. Evan 1976b:41)

Tghigheshnix ki q’u yenizen.

tghigh-	esh-	nix	ki q’u	yenizen
FUT/LEX-	1SG.S-	go.by.boat	next	want
I will go by boat			next	he wants

‘He wanted to go by boat.’

In (1.38), the first verb form is inflected for first person. The thing wanted by the subject of the second verb form is expressed as direct speech, ‘I will go by boat’, he wants’. Contrary to the English translation, verbs like *want* (or *say* and *think*, for that matter) do not subordinate other verbs. Instead, the object is expressed in direct speech, and the two verb forms follow each other without any conjunction.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.5 Conclusion

The preceding sections have been concerned with several aspects of Dena’ina phonology, morphology and syntax. A more detailed study of the first two topics as well as of verbal semantics can be found in Tenenbaum (1978), and there is also on-going research into some of these topics. Many other issues in the grammar of Dena’ina – be it nominal possession, the verbal aspectual system, or Dena’ina syntax – have never been investigated in a structured way. Thus, everything that was presented here must be thought of as preliminary.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ki q’u* ‘next’ is one of the conjunctions that may occur anywhere in the sentence, without a change in meaning.

## 2 The Pronominal System of Dena'ina

A large part of this thesis is dedicated to the function of various pronominal affixes. In order to prepare the ground for this analysis, this chapter will be concerned with general aspects of these pronominal affixes. In Section 2.1, we will look at the pronominal inventory of Dena'ina, split into the functional groups of subject pronominals, object pronominals, and possessor pronominals.

In Section 2.2, we will briefly investigate the so-called NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub> {V, PP, N} construction. Some Athabascan languages, like Navajo and the other Apachean languages (see among others Willie 1991, Thompson 1989, 1996, Kibrik to appear for Navajo, Sandoval & Jelinek 1989 for Jicarilla Apache, Hoijer 1938 for Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache) require the presence of an object or possessor prefix regardless of whether there is an immediately adjacent co-referential NP or not. Other Athabascan languages, like Slave and Dogrib (Rice 1989, 2000, 2003 on Slave, Saxon 1986, 1993 on Dogrib) require that NPs and pronominal prefixes be in complementary distribution, and co-occurrence of NPs and pronominal prefixes is restricted to topic constructions and similar special cases (see Saxon 1986 and Rice 2003 for detailed discussion of this problem). Dena'ina does not fall in either of these categories; both NP<sub>i</sub> Ø<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} and NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N}<sup>1</sup> are possible. Section 2.2 will be concerned with a possible explanation of this behavior.

### 2.1 The Pronominal Inventory

Subject inflection in Dena'ina is obligatory (as is inflection for mode and aspect); there is no such thing as an infinite verb form. Additionally to subject inflection, postpositions and transitive verbs have to be inflected for objects. Nouns may be marked for possessor. The object marking is formally identical with possessor marking.

In this section, we will first have a glance at subject marking, then turn to direct and postpositional object marking. Possessor marking will be considered last of all.

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<sup>1</sup> The first of these expressions is to be read as: no overt marker coreferential to the NP can be found on the verb, postposition, or noun. The second one means that there is an overt marker coreferential to the NP on the verb, postposition, or noun.

### 2.1.1 Subjects

In the verbal template (cf. chapter 1), there are two slots for subject pronominal prefixes. In the “inner” subject position, first and second person singular are marked as well as second person plural. All other pronominal prefixes appear in the “outer” subject position. Although both positions cannot be filled at the same time, they are clearly distinct, as shown in (2.1) for Dena’ina. Pronominal affixes are in italic typeface.

(2.1) subject marking<sup>2</sup>

Verb form	Neut-	OS-	IPF-	IS-	valence+stem	Translation
dghelkugh	d-		ghi-	<i>esh-</i>	kugh	‘I’m big’
dghinikugh	d-		ghi-	<i>n-</i>	kugh	‘you’re big’
dghikugh	d-		ghi-		kugh	‘s/he’s big’
dech’ghikugh	d-	<i>ch’-</i>	ghi-		kugh	‘we (2) are big’
dikugh	d-		ghi-	<i>eh-</i>	kugh	‘you (2) are big’
dehghikugh	d-	<i>q-</i>	ghi-		kugh	‘they (2) are big’

In (2.1), the imperfective paradigm of ‘be big’ is presented. Two things are obvious from this paradigm: Third person singular subject is unmarked, and first and third person plural are encoded in a different templatic position than the other pronominal prefixes.

If we just consider the paradigm in (2.1), the split in subject marking is rather surprising. There is no common feature of first and third person non-singular that is not shared by first and second person singular and second person non-singular; so why should some of these pronominal affixes occur in one position, and the rest of them in another?

However, first and third person non-singular are not the only prefixes that occur in the outer subject position. Dena’ina has two indefinite pronominal prefixes, *ch’-* for human beings and *k’-* for other entities, as well as an Areal pronominal prefix *q-* (this prefix has the allomorphs *qi-* and *h-*, and is therefore sometimes homophonous with the third person plural subject pronominal affix *q-* above). According to Tenenbaum (1978), all of these pronominal affixes occur in the same position or slot within the verb word as first and third person plural.

<sup>2</sup> The theme for ‘big’, *d+t+kugh*, is one of those themes that distinguish singular, dual and plural. In both (2.1) and (2.2), only singular and dual forms are presented, as the plural forms do not add information relevant to the point under discussion.

Observe (2.2):

(2.2) outer subjects

	Verb form	Adj-	OS	IPF	IS	valence+stem	translation
(a)	dech'ghikugh	d-	cb'-	ghi-		ɬkugh	'we (2) are big'
(b)	dech'ghikugh	d-	cb'-	ghi-		ɬkugh	'someone is big'
(c)	dek'ghikugh	d-	k'-	ghi-		ɬkugh	'something is big'
(d)	deqighikugh	d-	q-	ghi-		ɬkugh	'an area is big'
(e)	dehghikugh	d-	q-	ghi-		ɬkugh	'they (2) are big'

There also is a *y*- subject marker that can only occur if there is at least one more argument. This *y*- subject is illustrated in (2.3):

(2.3) *y*- subject

beyi'ik

b- y- i'ik  
BO- YS- kill.PL.O

'it killed them'

The *y*- subject will be discussed in great detail in chapter 4.

This first person plural pronominal affix *cb'* and its cognates in other Athabaskan languages (*ji*- in Navajo, *ts'e*- in Koyukon and Dogrib, to name only two) has oftentimes been likened to the French pronominal affix *on*, as in:

(2.4) French

(a) On ne sait pas que faire.  
ON NEG 3:know NEG what do

'One doesn't know what to do.'

(b) On prend un apéritif maintenant, n'est-ce pas?  
ON 3:take ART drink now QUEST

'Do we take a drink now?'

As obvious from the verbal inflection of both *sait* and *prend*, *on* has paradigmatic status as a third person pronoun, independent of whether it is interpreted as an indefinite pronoun (2.4a) or a first person plural pronoun (2.4b). A similar approach could be used for Dena'ina. The first person plural subject pronominal affix *cb'* is primarily an indefinite pronominal affix (comparable to French *on*), whose meaning has been extended to first person plural (cf. Saxon 1993, Willie &

Saxon 1995).

Thompson (1989a:49) lists three main functions for Koyukon *ts'e*<sup>3</sup>, which is cognate to Dena'ina *cb'*:

- (i) an indefinite or non-referential human third person
- (ii) a first person plural subject prefix
- (iii) a third person anaphoric prefix

Although Dena'ina *cb'* does not exhibit the third reading of *ts'e*<sup>4</sup>, it still becomes obvious that Koyukon *ts'e* has, as Dena'ina *cb'*, features of both third person and first person pronouns. It must be noted that cognates to Dena'ina *cb'* are not the only way first person plural subject is marked across the Athabascan language family. Instead, there is also a prefix reconstructed as *\*iid-* (Jung 1999:86) in the inner subject position.

Apachean					Pacific Coast Athabascan				
Jicarilla	Navajo	Mesc.	Lipan	Plains	Hupa	Mattole	Galice	Tututni	
ʷʷD	iiD-	VVD-	VVD-	VVD-	d-/y-	di-	id-	id-	

Canadian						Alaskan			
Tsuut'ina	Chip.	Slave	Dogrib	Sekani	Halfway <sup>5</sup>	Ahtna	Dena'ina	Koyukon	
aad-	íd-D-	íd-	wíd-	sə -i-d-	s-	ts'-	ts'-	ts'-	
		ts'e-	ts'e-	ts'ə-	ts'ə-				

Table 2.1: Athabascan first person nonsingular subject (taken from Jung 1999:81)

Table (2.1) shows the distribution of cognates of PA *\*ts'* and PA *\*iid-*, both meaning 'first person plural subject'. Most Athabascan languages (this cannot be seen in the table) exhibit cognates of PA *\*ts'*, although not necessarily in first person plural subject function. It always can encode an indefinite human or definite 'proximate' (in Thompson's 1989a terminology) referent (Jung 1999:92ff). The *\*iid-* prefix, on the other hand, is not present in all languages. Some of the Alaskan Athabascan languages, including Ahtna (Kari 1990), Koyukon (Jetté & Jones 2002), Tanacross (Holton 2000) and Dena'ina have lost the cognate of that morpheme. In these languages, cognates of PA *\*ts'* express both first person plural and human indefinite (with the possible extension of third person definite proximate) reference. In all these cases there is ambiguity between the readings of human indefinite and

<sup>3</sup>Thompson (1989) writes *ts'i*-. As the Koyukon orthography has changed since, the most recent spelling *ts'e*- will be used here.

<sup>4</sup>The consequences of this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> Halfway: Halfway River Beaver.

first person plural.<sup>6</sup>

The other prefixes found in the outer subject position – *q-* ‘human plural subject’, *q-* ‘Areal subject’, *k’-* ‘plain indefinite subject’ and *y-* ‘non-human subject’ – all refer to non-discourse participants. Although it might be possible to categorize all of them as ‘third person’, this will not be done throughout this study. The term ‘third person’ will be reserved for unmarked and *q-* [+ human, - singular] third person. Rice (2000:188) points out that *q-*, *k’-* and *ch’-* are, contrary to first and second person singular and second person plural, not inherently definite and/or specific. This claim, originally made for Slave, also holds true for Dena’ina:

(2.5a) *k’-* plain indefinite subject (Pete 1996:13)

nitsik’enitsey  
 ni- tsi- k’- ni- tsey  
 up.to- head- INDEF.S- PF- handle.LRO  
 something stuck its head out  
 ‘something (an animal) stuck its head out’

(2.5b) *ch’-* human indefinite subject (Pete 1996:14)

Ggagga chich’e’ishi quht’ana ghila.  
 ggagga chi- ch’- k- ’ish -i quht’ana ghila  
 brown.bear death- CH’- VV- kill -REL man he.was  
 brown bear someone who kills them man he was  
 He was a bear killer.

(2.5c) *q-* human plural (unspecific) (Nicolie 1976:8)

Yaqech’ ghuda sughu “Ndał gguya ghendat’ de’ i’ikidi lagi” na’eł hdghinih.  
 yaqech’ ghuda shughu ndał gguya ghendat’ de’  
 this.way due.to it.is crane little 2SG.move if  
 that’s the reason baby crane you come upon if  
 i’ikidi lagi na- eł q- dghinih  
 2SG.take.NEG NEG.IMP 1PL.O- to QS- say. CUST  
 don’t take it to us they used to tell  
 ‘That’s the reason they used to tell us, “If you come upon a baby crane, don’t take it.”’

The first of these pronouns, *k’-*, is by definition indefinite. Sometimes, it may be

<sup>6</sup> See Rice (2000) for additional information on what is encoded by cognates of *\*t’-* in those languages that have retained *\*iid*.

used to refer to a definite referent if that referent for some reason is taboo (there are several more cases where *k'*- refers to bears that already have been introduced into the discourse), but ordinarily, *k'*- is used when the referent is unknown or unspecific (cf. Tenenbaum 1978:62f). A function not mentioned by Tenenbaum, but very common in narratives, is that it is used to introduce new referents into the discourse, in a construction N *k'*- ghila ('N *k'*- was'), that basically translates to 'there was ...'. Compare (2.6):

(2.6) Shtukda bingha k'ghila. (Pete 1975:1)

sh-	tukda	b-	ingha	k'-	ghila
1SG.POSS-	father	B.POSS-	o.brother	INDEF.S-	was
my father		his older brother		there was	

'My father had an older brother'

(2.6) is a very common construction. In the first part of it, the referent is introduced by name or by relationship to one of the known referents in the discourse. The second part, the verb form *k'ghila* 'something was, there was' marks that this referent is new to the story. As indicated by the translation, *k'*- is still unspecific. When the referent is established in the discourse, the use of *k'*- is not continued, and the referent is encoded by other markers.

In (2.7), we see another example of *ch'*- used as an indefinite pronoun. In contrast to *k'*-, *ch'*- always refers to human subjects and is never used to introduce a new referent into the discourse. In Dena'ina, *ch'*- is rarely used as an indefinite pronoun. One context where it occurs with somewhat greater frequency is in negative imperatives:

(2.7) Negative Imperative (Pete 1989:5)

K'q'eh ch'elqadi dghayi!				
k'q'eh	ch'-	lqat	-i	dghayi
fat	CH'-	eat	-NEG.IMP	raw
fat		don't eat it		raw

'Don't eat fat raw!'

Dena'ina employs a very indirect strategy of telling people what not to do. The second person may be used in these contexts, but this happens rarely (one example, though, could be seen in (2.5c) above. Most common is the construction we see in (2.7), with a *ch'*- subject. This kind of impersonalization can be seen in many languages; see Rice (2000) for more discussion.

Last of all, *q-* ‘human plural subject’ also has a reading of unspecificity. The referent of *q-* in (2.5c) is not specific; the speaker is just talking about people in general, who taught her one rule of behavior. The exact identity of these people is irrelevant in the context of that utterance.

To summarize: *K'*- only occurs in indefinite readings, *cb'*- can be indefinite or impersonal (cf. Saxon 1993), while *q-* ‘plural subject’ can be both definite and indefinite, specific or unspecific. Thus, we have shown that three of the subject pronouns found in the outer subject position are not inherently marked for definiteness or specificity.

It must be pointed out, though, that both the Areal *q-* and the *y-* prefix cannot have an indefinite or unspecific reading. Thus, Rice (2000:18) claim that all of the outer subject prefixes are not inherently definite and specific cannot be maintained for Dena'ina, but only for *k'*-, *cb'*- indefinite, and *q-* human plural.

We have seen that there is a functional split between the subject pronouns marked in the inner subject position and the ones marked in the outer subject position. Rice (2000) attributes this split to the fact that the pronouns of the inner subject position mark *person* agreement, while the ones in the outer subject position mark *number* and *gender* agreement. The term ‘agreement’ as used by both Saxon (1986) and Rice (2000) implies theoretical assumptions not shared by me, but the functional split between the pronouns in both subject positions is obvious in Dena'ina.

### 2.1.2 *Object prefixes*

Object pronominal affixes also appear in two slots, according to their syntactic function. Direct objects, usually in the thematic role of patient, are marked immediately to the left of the outer subject position, while postpositional, or oblique, objects are marked at the left edge of the verb word, followed (and governed) by a postposition<sup>7</sup>. Postpositional objects may have all thematic roles that are not covered by either subject or direct object.

Formally, there is nearly no difference between direct and oblique objects. In (2.8), the inventory of direct object pronominals is given, in (2.9), the inventory of postpositional object pronominals. To illustrate the similarities in direct and oblique object marking, the examples for each are presented next to each other. If there is a gap in one of the columns, this pronoun can be used in only one object position.

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<sup>7</sup> In rare cases, this may be a  $\emptyset$ - postposition.

(2.8) Direct object marking

- (a) shghi'an  
sh- ghi'an  
1SG.O- saw  
'he saw me'
- (b) nghi'an  
n- ghi'an  
2SG.O- saw  
'he saw you (sg.)'
- (c) yeghi'an  
y- ghi'an  
YO- saw  
'he saw him/her'
- (d) gheshe'an  
Ø- gheshe'an  
ØO- 1SG.saw  
'I saw her'
- (e) beyghi'an  
b- y- ghi'an  
BO- YS- saw  
'it saw her'
- (f) naghi'an  
na- ghi'an  
1PL.O- saw  
'he saw us'
- (g) nheghi'an  
nh- ghi'an  
2PL.O- saw  
'he saw you (pl.)'
- (h) hghi'an  
h- ghi'an  
QO- saw  
'he saw them'
- (i) k'ghi'an  
k'- ghi'an  
INDEF.O - saw  
'he saw something'

(2.9) Oblique object marking

- (a) sheł gheyuł  
sh- eł gheyuł  
1SG.O- with move.PROG  
'she went with me'
- (b) neł gheyuł  
n- eł gheyuł  
2SG.O- with move.PROG  
'she went with you (sg.)'
- (c) yeł gheyuł  
y- eł gheyuł  
YO- with move.PROG  
'she went with it'
- (e) beł gheyuł  
b- eł gheyuł  
BO- with move.PROG  
'she went with him'
- (f) na'eł gheyuł  
na- eł gheyuł  
1PL.O- with move.PROG  
'she went with us'
- (g) nheł gheyuł  
nh- eł gheyuł  
2PL.O- with move.PROG  
'she went with you (pl.)'
- (h) heł gheyuł  
h- eł gheyuł  
QO- with move.PROG  
'she went with them'
- (i) k'inihnidaghi'uyi  
k'- ni- hnidaghi'u -i  
INDEF.O- on- PL.dries.O -REL  
's.th. they dry it on = fish drying tree'

(2.8) Direct object marking

(j) hghi'an

q-                    ghi'an  
AREAL.O-        saw

'he saw it (e.g. house)

(k) hughet'an

hu-                ghi'an  
REFL.O-        saw

's/he saw himself/herself'

(l) niłhghi'an

nił-                q-        ghi'an  
REC.O-            QS-        saw

'they saw each other'

(2.9) Oblique object marking

(j) Qenutsisk'natsset

q-                nu-        tsisk'natsset  
AREAL.O-        into-     pushed.my.head

'she pushed my head (into the boat)'

(k) hugh dayilgheł

hu-                egh                dayilgheł  
REFL.O-        with                take.SAO

'he takes her with himself'

(l) niłt'uy hdghasdnik

nił-                t'uy                q-        dhgasdnik  
REC.O-            meeting        QS-        paddle

'they came alongside of each other'

The similarities between the two systems are striking. Only one difference between direct and postpositional object marking can be found: If the subject is not unmarked third person and the object third person, the direct object may be marked by Ø- or *b*- (2.8d-e), while the same constellation requires a *b*- postpositional object (2.9e).<sup>8</sup>

Apart from that, the systems are identical. There are object pronominals for first, second, and third person singular and plural, there are object pronominals for *k'*- indefinite and *q*- Areal, and there are both a reflexive (*hu*-) and a reciprocal (*niŋ*-) object pronominal.

One more thing has to be said about direct objects. As mentioned above, direct objects necessarily fill a position in the argument structure. A basic difference between Dena'ina and other languages (as for example English or German) is that empty positions in the argument structure are not allowed. Thus, the following English and German utterances are grammatical, while the corresponding Dena'ina utterance is not:<sup>9</sup>

(2.10) English

(a) I ate fish.                      (b) I ate.

(2.11) German

(a) Ich aß Fisch.                      (b) Ich aß.  
I ate fish                                      I ate

(2.12) Dena'ina

(a) *ŋiq'a elqat.*                      (b) \**Elqat.*<sup>10</sup>                      (c) *K'elqat.*  
fish I ate                                      I ate.

<sup>8</sup> This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> It was pointed out to me (Sasse p.c.) that the grammaticality of the German and English examples might be due to the fact that the sentences in (a) and in (b) contain different verbs; *eat*<sub>1</sub> being transitive with a punctual meaning, *eat*<sub>2</sub> being intransitive with a durative, customary meaning. If that is the case, then I want to claim that this conversion is not possible for the Dena'ina verb.

<sup>10</sup> According to the rules we will discuss in chapter 3, this verb form should not be ungrammatical as first and second person subjects always trigger an unmarked third person object. However, *O+l+qat* 'eat O' seems to demand an overt object marker – or, perhaps, the indefinite marker *k'* is part of the verb theme and may not co-occur with an NP, resulting in the ungrammaticality of \**ŋiq'a k'elqat.*

Thus, if a verb is inherently transitive, as  $O+l+qat$  ‘eat O’, the direct object has to be morphologically realized. If the speaker does not want to mention what he is eating<sup>11</sup>, s/he still has to use pronominal prefix in the appropriate slot.  $K'$  ‘indefinite object’ serves best to encode this.

As mentioned in chapter 1, fn. 10, postpositions may be incorporated into the verb (in which case they are part of the verb theme, cf. (2.13a)), or they may be merely adjacent (2.13b). In the first case, the postpositional object is part of the argument structure of the verb, in the second case, it is not, as the postposition is not part of the verb. The corresponding verb themes to the utterances in (2.13) are displayed in (2.14).

(2.13a) incorporated postposition (Pete 1977:13)

Bagheshdghesh.  
 b- a- gheshdghesh  
 BO- through- 1SG.bite  
 ‘I bit him (lit.: I bit through him).’

(2.13b) optional, non-incorporated postposition

Beł gheyuł.  
 b- eł gheyuł  
 BO- with move.PROG  
 ‘She was walking with him.’

(2.14a)  $P+a\#D+gbach$  ‘bite P’

(2.14b)  $\emptyset+yu$  ‘walk’

To yield (2.13a) from the theme in (2.14a), merely the argument positions of the verb theme – subject and postpositional object argument – have to be filled (and the verb has to be inflected for mode, of course, but this is not relevant here). For (2.13b) to result from (2.14b), only subject (and modal) inflection is necessary to yield the perfectly grammatical verb form *gheyuł* ‘s/he was walking’. After that, the already fully inflected postpositional phrase *yeł*, derived from the postposition  $P-$  *eł* ‘with P’, can be added to this verb form. (2.13b) is not merely a theme with proper inflection, but it is a compound of an inflected theme and an inflected postposition.

The fact that some postpositions sometimes are only loosely bound to the

<sup>11</sup> My Gwich’in teacher Kathy Sikorsky explained the corresponding Gwich’in form with “If you don’t want to let people know what you’re eating, if you don’t want to share it with them, you say *a’al* ‘I’m eating *something*’”.

rest of the verb word also accounts for several other facts. In (2.15), we see that lexical material may intervene between an inflected postposition and the rest of the verb form. In (2.16), we see a case of postposition doubling; two postpositions attach to one verb word.<sup>12</sup>

(2.15) Shich'a sh'u dghishin. (Al. Evan 1976:18)

sh-	ch'a	sh	'u	dghishin
1SG.O-	away.from	1SG.Poss-	wife	pretty
more than me		my wife		she is pretty

'My wife is prettier than me.'

(2.16) Yeł quch'nushju. (Pete 1996:8)

y-	eł	q-	ch'-	nushju
YO-	with	AREAL.O-	to-	move.back
with him		to there		he went back

'He back-tracked himself with him.'

Last of all, some postpositions are not at all part of a verb form, but may occur in isolated condition. The latter case is rather rare. However, several examples like (2.17) occur in my data:

(2.17) Ggagga gin ki vetl'uyeh yudeq gheli yiłjeh. (Delkittie 1976:62)

ggagga	gin	ki	v-	tl'uyeh	yudeq	gheli
brown.bear	the	too	BO-	behind	up	really
the brown bear		too		behind him	up	really

yiłjeh  
slap.O  
he slapped him

'The bear [came] up right behind him and slapped at him.'

The postposition *P- tl'uyeh* 'behind P' in (2.17) is not part of a verb word; the only verb form it could be considered to belong to is *yiłjeh* 'he slapped him', which in combination with *vetl'uyeh* would not result in a meaningful sentence. Instead, *vetl'uyeh* occurs as independent postposition.

<sup>12</sup> It might be interesting to see which factors govern the order of two postpositions. However, I don't have enough systematic data to make any claims about this. Judging from the few examples that I have found, I would assume that one important factor is whether one of the postpositions is incorporated; in this case, the incorporated postposition would be further to the right than the unincorporated one. I have never seen a Dena'ina verb form with two incorporated postpositions. It remains to be seen, though, what happens if two unincorporated postpositions attach to a single verb form, and whether there are clear governing criteria for the ordering of them.

In this section, we have briefly reviewed the basic usages of pronominal object marking. It must be said, though, that most of the intricacies of that system have so far not been mentioned. We will revert to the question of object marking in chapter 3.

### 2.1.3 Possessor prefixes

As in the other Athabascan languages, the shape of the possessor prefixes in Dena'ina is nearly identical to the shape of object prefixes. With exception of the reflexive marker (marked by italics in the following example) , all forms are the same. An example of a possessed noun can be seen in (2.18):

(2.18) Holton, Kari & Müller (2004)<sup>13</sup>

shtutda	'my father'
ntutda	'your (SG.) father'
vetutda/betukda	'his/her father' <sup>14</sup>
natutda	'our father'
nhtutda	'your (PL.) father'
qututda	'their father'
k'tutda	'someone's father, a father'
<i>detutda</i>	'his/her own father'
nitutda	'each other's father'

The reflexive possessor prefix has the shape *d-*. Note that reflexive verb forms containing the object pronoun *bu-* always have this *d-* element, too, although this is not found in an argument position but is part of the qualifier zone instead (see chapters 5 and 6 for more discussion of this phenomenon). It also must be noted that the reflexive pronoun has to be named among the third person pronouns; if the subject of a sentence is not third person, then the reflexive possessor prefix may not be used. Reflexive pronouns are permitted only with third person subjects. Observe (2.19):

<sup>13</sup> The stem for *tutda* 'father' in this example is in the Nondalton dialect. In the Upper Inlet dialect, the form would be *tukda* – the form that will be seen in examples later in this study. See also the form *betukda* in (2.18).

<sup>14</sup> In some cases, *y-* is also permitted as possessor prefix. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. Non-reflexive third person possessor prefixes will be glossed as 'his/her/its/their', while reflexive possessor prefixes will be glossed as 'his own/her own/its own/their own'.

(2.19a) first person singular. subject, same possessor

Shtutda neʔan.

sh-                 tutda   neʔan  
1SG.POSS-       father 1SG.look.at

‘I looked at my father’

(2.19b) first person singular subject, reflexive possessor

\*Detutda neʔan.

d-                 tutda   neʔan  
REFL.POSS-       father 1SG.look.at

(Intended: I looked at my own father)

(2.19c) third person singular subject, reflexive possessor

Detutda niʔan.

d-                 tutda   niʔan  
REFL.POSS-       father look.at

‘S/he<sub>i</sub> looked at his/her own<sub>i</sub> father.’

(2.19d) third person singular subject, non-reflexive possessor

Vetutda niʔan.

v-                 tutda         niʔan  
B.POSS-       father         look.at

‘He<sub>i</sub> looked at his own<sub>i</sub>/her<sub>j</sub> father’

Note that (2.19d) is ambiguous: The pronominal *b-* can refer to both the subject of the clause as to somebody else. This ambiguity can only be resolved by context.

It already was mentioned in chapter 1 that some nouns require possessor prefixes while others do not. If, for some reason, a speaker does not know or want to mention who or what is the possessor of an obligatorily possessed noun, the indefinite possessor prefix *kʔ-* is chosen. In some of these cases, we can even observe possessor doubling:<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The same construction can be seen in Koyukon (Thompson 1996a:66). According to him, the possessive *kʔ-* alienates the possessed entity from its possessor, so that possession by somebody else is made possible.

(2.20a) indefinitely possessed

k'tsen  
k'-            tsen  
INDEF.POSS-    meat  
'meat'

(2.20b) definitely possessed

shtsen  
sh-            tsen  
1SG.POSS-    meat  
'my flesh, flesh from my body'

(2.20c) possessor doubling (Holton, Kari, & Müller 2004:18)

shk'tsen  
sh-            k'-            tsen  
1SG.POSS-    INDEF.POSS--    tsen  
'my meat'

In (2.20a), the prefix *k'*- indicates that it is not relevant or known to the speaker who or what the meat originally belonged to. With a first person singular possessor as in (2.20b), the speaker indicates that the meat is originally possessed by the speaker – indicated by the gloss 'flesh from my body'. In (2.20c) the indefinite possessor indicates that the meat originally was part of an animal, while the first person singular subject possessor expresses that this indefinitely possessed meat is now possessed by me.

Double possessor constructions seem only to be possible if the first possessor (the one closer to the noun stem) is marked by the indefinite marker *k'*-.

#### 2.1.4 *Summary*

In the preceding section, we have investigated the pronominal inventory of Dena'ina. We have seen that there are two types subject positions within the verb word. It has also been shown that the inventory for direct objects, oblique objects and possessors is formally nearly identical.

## 2.2 The NP<sub>i</sub> pronominal<sub>i</sub>-V construction

The Athabaskan language family can be divided into two groups with respect to the co-occurrence of object NPs and object pronominals. In most of the southern Athabaskan languages, mainly the Apachean languages and Navajo, the verb has to

be inflected for third person object irrespective of whether there is a free NP co-indexed with the object or not (cf. Hoijer 1938 for Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache, Sandoval & Jelinek 1989 for Jicarilla Apache, Liebe-Harkort (1985) for Plains Apache, Shayne (1982) for San Carlos Apache, Speas 1990, Willie 1991, 2000, Uyechi 1996, Hale 1973, Frishberg 1972, Thompson 1996b and many more for Navajo). In the northern Athabaskan languages, however, another pattern prevails. In this group, (free) object NPs and (bound) object pronominals are in complementary distribution. Languages with this feature include but are not restricted to: Salcha (Tuttle 1996), Koyukon (Thompson 1996b), Gwich'in (Thompson 1996b), Slave (Rice 1989, 2000, 2003), Dogrib (Saxon 1986, 1993), to name but a few.

The following examples illustrate both patterns.

(2.21) Jicarilla Apache (Jung 1999:125)

(a) bijshzháá na- i- n- ł- kj  
 fawn back- YO- CNJ<sup>16</sup>- VV- carry.SAO  
 'She carried the fawn back.'

(b) na- i- n- ł- kj  
 back- YO- CNJ- VV- carry.SAO  
 'She carried it back.'

(c) Jung (p.c.)  
 \* na- n- ł- kj

(d) Jung (p.c.)  
 \*bijshzháá na- n- ł- kj

It is not possible to omit the *y*- prefix if there is no co-referential NP present.

(2.22) Dogrib (Saxon 1986:59)

(a) Cheko kwik'i nàjzhì.  
 boy gun break  
 'The kid broke the gun'

(b) Cheko n̄jyijzhì.  
 boy Y- break  
 'The kid broke it'

<sup>16</sup> CNJ is the abbreviation for conjugation marker; the corresponding category in Dena'ina would be *mode*.

- (c) \*Cheko      kwik'i      nàyjzhi.  
 boy            gun            Y- break

In some instances, like for example topicalization, the co-occurrence of object NPs and object pronominals is possible at least in Slave (Rice 2003) and Dogrib (Saxon 1986). However, this is an exceptional pattern, which is clearly marked.

It turns out, though, that there is a third group that has not been discussed as extensively in the literature. So far, two Athabaskan languages are known that belong to neither pattern, or rather, they exhibit both patterns. One of them is the Canadian language Babine-Witsuwit'en as described by Gunlogson (2001), and the other one is Dena'ina, first mentioned in this context by Thompson (1996b:91).

In both of these languages, both patterns are permitted. Gunlogson (2001) does not provide the information about how often this particular way of marking occurs, but a study undertaken by myself for Dena'ina shows that approximately half of all verb forms with more than one argument exhibit the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} pattern. Cf. Table 2.2:

	DO	OO	Poss	Total
Pronominal	60	36	20	116
Zero	80	63	24	167
Total	140	99	44	283

Table 2.2: Distribution of marked and unmarked object pronominals

For Table 2.2, all occurrence were counted in which both (i) and (ii) are true:

- (i) both subject and object/possessor are unmarked third person
- (ii) an NP co-referential to the object/possessor precedes the verb within the same clause<sup>17</sup>

It follows from Table 2.2 that the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} construction is not an exception in Dena'ina, but is nearly equal to the pattern without the pronominal. It is likely that two different constructions have different functions, so the question is: In which respect do these constructions differ?

<sup>17</sup> There are several cases where an NP precedes the verb but belongs to a different clause (as afterthought of the preceding clause, which is usually indicated by intonation). These cases were not considered in the present context.

In her discussion of Babine-Witsuwit'en, Gunlogson (2001:374f.) ruled out that the co-occurrence of pronominal and nominal objects is due to lexical properties of the noun or to an agentivity distinction. I will show here that the same thing is true for Dena'ina.

(2.23) Direct Object

(a) NP pron-V (Pete 1978:3)

(...) dek'isen ghu heyighetneq qit'aniyit.  
*dek'isen ghu qey- ghetneq qit'aniyit*  
 woman that QS:YO- took he.knew  
 that woman they had taken her he knew

'(...) he knew that they had taken his woman.'

(b) NP V (Pete 1975:7)

Tuqenkaq' ghu sukan hnuq'u iyni nu'ighetneq.  
 Tuqenkaq' ghu sukan hnuq'u  
 Alexander.Creek there morning when  
 at Alexander Creek in the morning  
*iyni nu- Ø- 'ighetneq*  
 gun ITER- ØO- took  
 his gun he took again

'One morning at Alexander Creek he took his gun.'

(2.24) postpositional object

(a) NP pron-PP V (Pete 1996:4)

Betukda ghu yegheyedulnik ch'u.  
*betukda ghu y- ghe- yedulnik ch'u*  
 his.father that.one YO- to- reach.down and  
 his father that he reached down to him and

'He reached down to his father'

(b) NP PP V (Pete 1996:4)

Betukda ghe ch'an'iju.  
*betukda Ø- ghe ch'an'iju*  
 his.father ØO- to move.out  
 his father to he came back out

'He came back out to his father.'

(2.25) possession (Pete 2003:164)

(a) N<sub>POSS</sub> Pron<sub>POSS-</sub> N  
*Tommy betukda*  
Tommy his father  
'Tommy's father'

(b) N<sub>POSS</sub> N (Pete 2003:165)  
*Tommy ghun tukda*  
Tommy DEM father  
'Tommy's father'

Examples (2.23) to (2.25) show that the variation between the patterns NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i-</sub> {V, PP, N} and NP<sub>i</sub> Ø- {V, PP, N} cannot be accounted for lexically. In (2.23), both patterns occur with the verb stem *neq* 'take, grab', in (2.24), with the postposition *gbe* 'to', and in (2.25) with the noun *tukda*, 'father'.

The other explanation suggested by Gunlogson was animacy. She points out that in Babine-Witsuwit'en, animacy does not influence the distribution of the two patterns. Animate object referents neither require nor forbid the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i-</sub> {V, PP, N} pattern, and the same is true for inanimate object referents. (2.24a,b) shows that human animate referents in Dena'ina likewise may or may not exhibit this pattern. (2.23a,b) might suggest that the pattern without the object pronominal is used whenever the object is inanimate. However, this can be disproved by (2.26):

(2.26) inanimate object NP and *y-* marking (Pete 1977:4)

Dekilaqa *luq'u* heyighetneq (...)  
dekilaqa *luq'u* *qey-* ighetneq  
his.helpers everything QS:YO- took  
his helpers everything they picked up  
'His helpers picked up everything (...).'

So far, the claims made by Gunlogson (2001) for Babine-Witsuwit'en were also correct for Dena'ina: The co-existence of two patterns for object and possessor marking is neither motivated lexically, nor can animacy account for it. She suggests instead that a) the definiteness of the referent triggers this sequence and b) that it may also be used to introduce new referents that then are discourse topics. For this study, I have looked at four texts (Trip to Susitna Station and The Hunting Dog by Shem Pete, Porcupine Story by Gulia Delkittie and Raven and his Wives Story by

Alexie Evan)<sup>18</sup> in order to see whether her claims are true for Dena’ina.

In those four texts, there are 33 verb forms that exhibit the pattern under discussion.<sup>19</sup> Table 2.1 shows how these verb forms can be categorized. The column “Determined” indicates whether there is an overt determiner in the relevant NP. Overt determiners in Dena’ina include demonstratives (as discussed in section 1.3.5) and relative clauses. “Possessed Nouns” are nouns that include an overt possessive prefix or have an overt nominal possessor. “Proper Name” is self-explanatory; “New Referent” finally refers to occasions when a new referent is introduced into the discourse. All these cases have been described by Gunlogson (2001) as triggering the construction NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N}.<sup>20</sup>

Total	Proper Name	Determined	Possessed	New Referent
33	3	22	5	3

Table 2.3: Categorization of verb forms with NP<sub>i</sub> pron<sub>i</sub>-V

Table 2.3 clearly shows that Gunlogson’s claims can be applied to Dena’ina as well as for Babine-Witsuwit’en. Of the 33 examples considered here, all fall into one of the categories postulated by Gunlogson.

Due to the fact that most of the data used in this study comes from mythological stories, there are very few occurrences of proper names.<sup>21</sup> However,

<sup>18</sup>Only a fraction of the big corpus of this study was used for this overview, in the assumption that this sample was sufficiently representative (two texts in the Upper Inlet dialect, two texts in the Inland dialect; one text told mainly in the first person, three texts told mainly in the third person).

<sup>19</sup> As opposed to Gunlogson’s study, instances where we see the sequence NP<sub>i</sub> b<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} are also included, as *b-* seems to be used much more frequently in Dena’ina than it is in Babine-Witsuwit’en.

<sup>20</sup> In several cases, more than one of the criteria applied, so that the NP contained both a possessor and a determiner and served to introduce a new referent at the same time, as in (i):

(i) pbb029

(...) dekalt’a ghin tuvugh niyenidggat.  
d-                      kalt’a      ghin      tuvugh    ni-      y-      enidggat  
REFL.POSS-          tail          this      beach    on-      YO-      handle.LRO  
his own tail                      this      beach    he put it on

‘(...) he put his tail on the beach.’

In those cases, the order determiner > possessive > new referent applied. In an example like the one just mentioned, the NP would have been categorized as determined. If, in another case, an NP is possessed and introduces a new referent at the same time, it was only considered to be possessed, and the introduction of a new referent was ignored. The reason for putting the determiner before the possessive is that definite NPs that have been introduced into the narrative are nearly always accompanied by a demonstrative in Dena’ina, while they are not necessarily possessed. Thus, determination is more frequent and less marked than possession.

<sup>21</sup> See Fall (1990) for a discussion of proper names in Alaskan Athabascan storytelling.

the few occurrences found in the data do show the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} pattern (all of them occurred in possessive constructions), with only one exception shown in (25b) above.

Not surprisingly, about two thirds of all cases where an NP co-occurred with a co-referential pronominal have NPs that contain a demonstrative. Remember that Dena'ina makes extensive use of its demonstrative system (cf. section 1.3.5). Rarer are the occurrences of possessed nouns and nouns that introduce a new referent into the discourse participating in this construction. However, possessed nouns and nouns introducing a new referent are much less frequent in natural Dena'ina speech than nouns that are accompanied by a demonstrative. Examples (2.27-2.30) illustrate this:

(2.27) Proper name (Pete 2003:164)

Tommy betukda  
 Tommy      b-      tukda  
 Tommy      B.Poss- father  
 'Tommy's father'

(2.28) Determined (Pete 1989:3)

Łik'akda ghin qeyech' tudelggesh.  
 Łik'a    -kda    ghin    qey-    ech'      tudelggesh  
 dog    -old    this    QS:YO- from      they start to go  
 this old dog                      from it                      they walk away  
 'They started to walk away from the old dog.'

(2.29) Possessed (Pete 1989:4)

Ch'u dingha itl'uy nushełdaltuk' (...)  
 ch'u    d-                      ingha                      y-      tl'uy                      nushełdaltuk'  
 and    REFL.POSS-    o.brother                      YO-    back.to                      run.back  
 and    his own older brother                      to him                      he ran back  
 'And he ran back to his older brother (...)'

(2.30) Introduction of new referent (Delkittie 1976:60f.)

(a) Yinch'en yeł niqatsighalkit.

yinch'en	y <sub>P</sub> -	eł	niqatsi-	Ø <sub>B</sub> -	ghalkit
across	YO-	with	to.shore-	ØS-	swim.PF
across		with him	he swam to the shore		

'He swam to the other side with him.'

(b) Veł yagheli gheli.

v <sub>P</sub> -	eł	yagheli		gheli
BO-	with	good	really	
with him		it was good	really	

'He was really happy.'

(c) Q'uyehdi eseni yiqā ghilgguk ha'.

q'uyehdi	eseni <sub>C</sub>	y <sub>C</sub> -	iqā	Ø <sub>P</sub> -	ghilgguk	ha'
and.then	cottonwood	YO-	up	ØS-	go	EMPH
then	cottonwood	up it	he climbed			

'And then he climbed up a cottonwood.'

Examples (2.27-2.29) do not need further explanation. Let us thus turn to (2.30), taken from the Porcupine and Brown Bear story. In (2.30a,b), the greater context is given, showing that the referent referred to by both an NP and a pronominal – the cottonwood tree – is truly new to the discourse. In the short stretch of text in (2.30), there are three participants: Porcupine with the index P, Beaver with the index B, and a cottonwood tree with the index C. At this point in the story, Porcupine has just gotten his wish to cross the river and eat all the plants on the other side. So, in (2.30c), he can finally climb the first tree and start eating. Porcupine has earlier on said that he wants to eat cottonwood and spruce trees, but this particular cottonwood tree has not been mentioned before. Therefore (considering that the tree is neither modified by a determiner nor a relative clause or possessor), the use of the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} cannot be explained here.<sup>22</sup>

In chapter 1, the determiner system of Dena'ina was mentioned. It was pointed out that Dena'ina makes extensive use of these determiners, with the result that nearly every definite NP contains one of these determiners. It can be

<sup>22</sup> Actually, this raises the question whether the introduction of new referents really is one of the functions of this particular construction. However, this is not relevant to the subsequent discussion of participant marking, so this topic will be left for future research.

postulated that any NP that consists of a noun and a determiner is definite.<sup>23</sup> An NP also is definite if it is a proper name or if it is possessed. Let us check now whether Gunlogson’s claim is true in both directions: If she is right, there should be no cases of indefinite NPs in an NP-*y*- construction, and no cases of definite NPs without an overt object prefix. The same corpus will be used.

Total	Proper name	Determined	Possessed	New	Indefinite
26	0	2	3	0	21

Table 2.4: Indefinite NPs

For the greater part, our assumptions seem to be correct.<sup>24</sup> NPs that are definite, that is, proper names, determined NPs and possessed NPs usually occur in the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} construction and not out of it, as shown in Tables 2.3 and 2.4. There are no cases of a new (important) NP introduced outside of the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} construction.

We have explained the cases where an indefinite noun may participate in this construction, so now we have to find a reason for the determined and possessed NPs of Table 2.4 to not participate in it. There seems to be no explanation for the fact that in the present corpus, two determined NPs occur without an anaphoric pronominal prefix. Cf. (2.31):

(2.31a) determined NP without co-referential pronominal (Al. Evan 1976:18)

Ts’it’an ghun nch’u hugh dayilgheł ts’it’an ghun yan huł nugheltał yan.  
 ts’it’an ghun nch’u hugh da- y- ilgheł  
 one that not with.himself into- YO- handle.SAO  
 the one of them not he takes her with himself

<sup>23</sup>Bear in mind that all Dena’ina determiners are definite.

<sup>24</sup>The total of nouns that do not participate in this construction is lower than the total of nouns that do, even though Table 2.3 suggests the opposite relation. This is due to the fact that one of the texts taken for this short study, *Trip to Susitna Station*, is mainly in the first person. In chapter 3, we will see that first and second person subjects usually trigger unmarked objects – thus neither *b-* or *y-* are present in such cases. For Table 2.3, cases where a *b-* prefix occurs in spite of this general tendency were counted. For Table 2.4, cases where no prefix occurs were not counted, as it is not possible to determine whether the lack of prefix is due to the general tendency or to the (in) definiteness of the referent.

ts'it'an	ghun	yan	huł	nu-	Ø-	gheltał	yan
one	that	only	with.himself	ITER-	ØO-	handle.SAO	only
the other one	only	he	takes her	with himself	again	only	

‘One of them, he never takes her along in his boat, he only ever takes the other one with him.’

(2.31b) determined NP without co-referential pronominal (Pete 1989:3)

Dingha ghunen tl'uynuyiltash ch'u (...)

dingha	ghunen	Ø-	tluynuyiltash	ch'u
older.brother	that	ØO-	bring.back.SAO	and
his older brother		he	brought it back to him	and

‘He brought [the dog] back to his older brother (...)’

Even more confusing is that in (2.31a), nearly the same situation is expressed in the two clauses, but one of them contains the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} construction and the other one does not. At the present time, this cannot be explained.

Let us now look at the possessed forms. Compare the following examples:<sup>25</sup>

(2.32a) Al. Evan (1976:22)

Yelu ldeł łu (...)

y-	lu	Ø-	ldeł	łu
Y.Poss-	side	ØO-	handle.PL.O	it.is.said
its sides		he	was slapping	it is said in

‘He was slapping its sides (...)’

(2.32b) Pete (2003:167)

(...) Stepan Yagu iy bit'a ɣyeł.

Stepan	Yagu	iy	b-	t'a	Ø-	yeł
Stepan	Yagu	3S	B.Poss-	flipper	ØO-	grab
Stepan	Yagu	he	its flipper			he grabbed it

‘(...) Stepan Yagu, he grabbed its flipper.’

Again, there is no clear explanation that immediately springs to mind. Quite possibly, possession in Dena'ina does after all not imply that the referent be definite, and the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i</sub>-{V, PP, N} construction only renders an otherwise indefinite possessed NP definite. Another possibility, at least in the case of (2.32a), might be

<sup>25</sup> The phrase *yelu ldeł* occurs twice in the corpus; thus, all three occurrences are considered, even if there are only two examples.

underspecification with respect to number. (2.32a) is one of these cases where the object is non-singular, as implied by the verb stem. Because the boat is not human, the plural is not expressed pronominally, but the combination of *y-* object marker and the verb stem *datl'* 'handle.PL.O' might be blocked. The verb stem in (2.32b), however, is unspecified as to number, so that there is no way of knowing whether one or two flippers were involved.

Our basic hypothesis is born out – the NP<sub>i</sub> Pron<sub>i-</sub>{V, PP, N} construction occurs whenever the NP is determined, possessed, a proper name, or is being introduced into the discourse, and it does not occur in all other cases. However, even in this very reduced corpus used for this short study, there were several exceptions that could not be explained in the present context. Thus, a more detailed study should be done. The general tendencies, however, seem to be clear.

We have seen that Dena'ina, just as Babine-Witsuwit'en, exhibits both the Apachean and the Northern Athabaskan pattern of participant marking: If an object or possessor NP is present, a co-referential pronominal marker may or may not appear on the noun, verb or postposition. Similarly, Gunlogson's (2001) claim that the additional pronominal prefix occurs if the referent is definite and specific holds true for Dena'ina as well as for Babine-Witsuwit'en.

### 2.3 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been twofold: to introduce the pronominal inventory of Dena'ina, organized into the functional categories of subject, object and possessor. It was shown that in the domain of pronominals referring to discourse participants, object and subject marking differ significantly, not only with respect to the pronominal inventory, but also with respect to the position of the morpheme within the verb word.

In the domain of non-discourse participants, the division was much less clear. Not only do the morphemes occur in adjacent positions, but the formal differences between subject and object markers were usually very small, if at all existent.<sup>26</sup>

Direct objects, postpositional objects and possessor prefixes are distinguished from each other mainly by position, with direct object markers occurring to the left edge of the conjunct zone, postpositional object markers occurring in front of a postposition, and possessor markers being a nominal affix.

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<sup>26</sup>These issues will be revisited in chapter 5.

There are some slight differences in the inventory of these kinds of pronominals, but mostly, they are identical.

Last of all, we considered the question of why Dena'ina has both the Northern and the Southern Athabaskan distribution of object/possessor prefixes and free NPs. It was shown that the distribution in Dena'ina is similar to the one in Babine-Witsuwit'en as described by Gunlogson (2001).

### 3 Object and possessor marking

It goes without saying that object and possessor marking are quite different categories in Dena'ina (as in other languages, for that matter). Object marking serves the function of filling an empty position in the – basic or extended – argument structure of the verb or postposition. It is obligatory in the sense that if such an empty position exists, it has to be filled. Object marking therefore is an obligatory verbal or postpositional category.

Possessor marking, on the other hand, is a nominal category. It is obligatory in some cases, as some Dena'ina nouns require to be marked for possession. This class of nouns is fairly small and closed. Most nouns can be marked for possession, but they do not have to be. Thus, possessor marking is in the majority of cases non-obligatory.

Although they are different categories and serve different functions, object and possessor marking will both be discussed in this chapter. The reason for this is twofold: First of all, we have seen in the preceding chapters that possessor and object prefixes are formally nearly identical.<sup>1</sup> More important is that similar factors govern the choice of both kinds of prefixes.

The organization of this chapter is as follows. We will begin by discussing direct object marking (3.1). This section will be bi-partite, first focusing on direct object marking with an overt subject, then on direct object marking with an unmarked or *q*- subject. In 3.2, postpositional and oblique objects will be discussed, with the same organization of the chapter. Last of all, in section 3.3, possessor marking will be considered, again split into subsections on possessor marking with overt subjects and with unmarked or *q*- subjects. The results will be summarized in 3.4.

In all cases, we will focus on third person objects, that is, objects marked by *y*- (*q*-) and *b*- (*qub*-), and unmarked objects ( $\emptyset$ -). Other objects will not be considered in this discussion, as their behavior is regular and predictable.

#### 3.1 Direct object marking

The shape of the third person direct object pronominal depends to a large degree on the shape of the subject. An unmarked subject triggers a different object prefix than a marked subject, and not all marked subjects trigger necessarily the same object

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<sup>1</sup> Bear in mind that there is also a slight difference between the direct and the postpositional object systems.

prefix. We will begin by discussing object marking with marked subjects (first and second person, the indefinites etc.) and turn to object marking with unmarked subjects later in this section.

### 3.1.1 *First and second person subject*

Third person direct objects are generally unmarked if the subject is first or second person singular or plural.

(3.1a) first person singular subject acting on third person object

Neʔan.

n- sh- ʔan  
QUAL- 1SG.S- look.at

‘I looked at him/her/it/them.’

(b) first person plural subject acting on third person object

Chʔniʔan.

chʔ- n- ʔan  
1PL.S- QUAL- look.at

‘We looked at him/her/it/them.’

In Chapter 2, we have seen that there are two positions or slots within the verb word where subjects may be marked. In (3.1), we see an example for both third person direct object marking with a marked subject of the inner subject position (3.1a), and for third person direct object marking with a marked subject of the outer subject position (3.1b). This positional split, however, does not have consequences for the object marking. *ɕbʔ*- ‘first person subject’ requires an unmarked third person object as well as all the other subject markers.

The same holds true for third person plural objects. If the subject is first or second person singular or plural and the object is third person plural, the object prefix *q-*, unmarked third person plural object, is the prefix of choice. Cf. (3.2):

(3.2a) Hneʔan.

q- n- sh- ʔan  
QO- QUAL- 1SG.S- look.at

‘I looked at them.’

(3.2b) Ch'ehniʔan.

ch'- h- n- ʔan  
CH'- QO- QUAL- look.at

'We looked at them.'

This suggests that *q-* object prefix only marks its referent for (absolute) human-ness (or animacy, as the case may be) and, of course, for non-singular. *q-* does not imply a heightened discursive relevance of its referent, and thus will be classified further on as one of the unmarked object prefixes.

Of course, exceptions to this pattern of unmarked objects can be observed if the subject is first or second person, although it has to be said that they are very rare and motivated rather by semantic and pragmatic considerations of the speaker than by syntactic mechanisms. Inherently, a first or second person referent – the speaker or listener in the speech act – is more salient and referentially grounded in the discourse than any given third person referent, be that one human, animate or inanimate. Very rarely, and only on a sentence-to-sentence basis, may a third person referent become more 'relevant' (see Thompson 1989a, 1989b on the concept of relevance) than one of the speech act participants. Thus, the fact that the third person object is unmarked reflects the 'natural' order of things: A relevant referent is acting on an (unmarked) irrelevant one.

In some cases, the relative relevance of referents may be reversed. For some reason, the speaker judges that the third person object be more salient or more important to the discourse than a first or second person subject. In these cases, the third person object is marked by *b-* instead of being unmarked.

It is interesting that the singular object marker *b-* does not occur with a first or second person subject in natural speech. It is necessary, though, to point out that these constellations do occur in elicitation, usually in variation with an unmarked object. In (3.3), I present an example from an elicitation:

(3.3a) 1SG.S, BO

Nch'u qadavdishnek.

nch'u qada- v- di- esh- nek  
not LEX- BO- QUAL- 1SG.S- hear

'I can't hear him.'

(3.3b) 1SG.S, ØO

Nch'u qada'idishnek.

nch'u qada'idi- esh- nek  
not LEX-/QUAL- 1SG.S- hear

'I can't hear him.'

In (3.3), the reason why the object referent is so important is quite simple: The verb form elicited before (3.3a) was *nch'u qada'indishnek* 'I can't hear you'. When I then asked for (3.3a), I stressed the *him*, so the speaker did the same thing. Another speaker that was present at the time then suggested (3.3b) as an alternative form. Thus, the use of *b-* object pronominal with a first or second person subject is possible; however, it is always marked and usually indicates that the object referent is highly relevant.

A bit more common is the use of the plural counterpart of *b-*, *qub-* as direct object marker with first or second person subjects. One example for this can be seen in (3.4b):

(3.4) *qub-* as direct object with second person subject (Nicholie 1976:5)

(a) K'ełdun ghunahdi tage nqitdunił ch'u nnuhtnutuh.

k'ełdun ghuna -hdi tage nqitdunił  
some those -as.for sorry they.will.be  
as for some of them sorry they will be

ch'u n- nu- q tnutuh  
and 2SG.O- to- QS- help  
and they will help you

'Some of them will be sorry for you and help you.'

(b) Yina ghuhdi tiye qil hnu'u qiqubetghilłghelł.

yina ghuhdi tiye qil hnu'u  
these there really bad when  
these there really bad when

qi- qub- tgh- n- łghelł  
down- QBO- FUT- 2SG.S- handle.SAO  
you'll let them down

'When it gets really bad, let those ones into the hole.'

From the greater context of the utterance in (3.4), the *qub-* prefix in (3.4b) is a bit easier to explain. The people it refers to are the topic of the utterance and the one preceding it, this is clear by the use of the topic marker *-bdi* ‘as for’. As the topic of the sentence – note that a free pronoun co-referential to them, *yina*, also occurs in the topic position of (3.4b) – it is only natural that there be an overt pronominal referring to them, especially as the free pronoun is divided by another verbless clause (*gbubdi tiye qil hnu’u* ‘when things get bad there’) from the verb form.

To conclude, although the default case with first and second person subjects is that the object is not overtly expressed, the latter may in rare cases, when stressed or highly topical, be marked by the overt marker *b-* or, slightly more often, by the plural object marker *qub-*.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1.2 Indefinite and non-human subjects: The existence of animacy hierarchies

We have seen in the preceding section that *b-* as an object marker is very rare, and highly marked, with first and second person subjects. However, this does not mean that *b-* can never occur as a third person direct object marker. Contrariwise, it appears quite often in this function, namely always when the subject is neither first or second nor unmarked third person. Thus, plain indefinite *k’-* and non-human *y-* subjects require *b-* third person object.

(3.5) indefinite subject *k’-* (Pete 2003:168)

Hełch’ ch’u q’u yach’u qubek’ełch’ish.

hełch’	ch’u	q’u	yach’u	qub-	k’-	łch’ish.
evening	and	then	thus	QBO-	INDEF.S-	be.windy
by evening	and	then	thus	something was	windy towards	them

‘By evening they had gotten wind-exposed.’

(3.6) non-human subject (Pete 2003:167)

Deghi łuq’u beyu’eł ghuda ch’u yeluh hnu duguli eł.

deghe	łuq’u	b <sub>Tom-</sub>	y <sub>Seal-</sub>	u’eł	ghuda	ch’u
teeth	all	BO-	YS-	bite	because	and
its teeth	all	it bit	him		because	and

<sup>2</sup> This latter fact – that *qub-* as direct object prefix with first and second person subjects is more frequent than *b-* – is probably due to the fact that the plural prefix is restricted to human referents, that are by nature more topical and relevant than non-human referents.

y <sub>Seal-</sub>	Ø <sub>Tom-</sub>	luh	hnu	duguli	eł
YO-	ØS-	hold	then	work axe	with
he held it			then	an axe	with

‘Because it (seal) bit him with its teeth, he (Tommy) held it (at a distance) with an axe.’

If we consider the two sentences in (3.5), it becomes obvious that the referents in question differ greatly with respect to salience and referential grounding. The women have already been introduced earlier into the discourse (note that in (3.5a), they are accompanied by the demonstrative *gbuna* ‘human non-singular distal’). Although the same could be said about the weather – this paragraph of the narrative deals with the problematic weather conditions – the women are more salient and relevant by virtue of being human. According to the concept of agency proposed by Leer (1993), the women are more likely to be actors in any part of the narrative than the wind, as women (and people in general) are generally more inherently agentive than weather conditions. However, in (3.5b) a prototypically non-agentive referent is acting on an inherently agentive one.

The constellation in (3.6) is similar. Although both a seal and a human being are animate, the range of possible actions open to the human being is considerably greater than the one of a seal. Thus, in both (3.5) and (3.6), there is an agency asymmetry between subject and object: In both examples, a lower-ranking subject is affecting a higher-ranking object.

Let us compare that to the situation we saw in (3.1). A first person referent is acting on a third person referent; and it was mentioned that first and second person referents, due to their discursive functions, are by definition more salient and referentially grounded than third person referents. Thus, another asymmetry, this time reflecting salience and referential grounding, exists between subject and object.

The asymmetries observed in (3.1) on the one hand and (3.5) and (3.6) on the other differ slightly, but this is not the issue here. What concerns us now is the way Dena’ina *reflects* such asymmetries. If the subject is more salient, more referentially grounded, and, as we will see in following examples, more animate or inherently agentive than the object, the object is unmarked. In the opposite case, with the subject less salient, less referentially grounded, or less animate or inherently agentive, the object is marked by *b-*.

It already starts to emerge from the data we have seen so far that Dena’ina speakers make assumptions about whether a particular situation encodes the ‘natural’



Both (3.7) and (3.8) were refused by all speakers. Humans usually do not bite seals, so (3.7) is essentially meaningless. Furthermore, speakers presented with (3.7) always wanted to know where the axe came into play – why should Tommy use an axe to keep the seal away from himself while he is biting it. No speaker considered (3.7) an acceptable sentence, even though all argument positions are filled. The sentence was refused solely for semantic and pragmatic reasons like the ones stated above.

Likewise, (3.8) is not an acceptable verb form. The verb theme ‘be windy’ usually does not have an overt subject pronoun. The only acceptable verb form of this theme is (3.9):

(3.9) qanich’ey  
 ‘it is windy’

To summarize, both indefinite *k’-* and non-human *y-* trigger a *b-* marked third person object.

What, though, about the human indefinite pronoun *ch’-*? We have seen in Chapter 2 that it is homophonous with and related to the first person plural subject pronoun *ch’-*. It was shown in (3.1) in this chapter that the first person plural subject triggered an unmarked third person object. In (3.10), we see that this is also true for the human indefinite. (3.10b) illustrates that the *ch’-* used in the negative imperative does not trigger different object marking than *ch’-* ‘first person subject’:

(3.10a) Ch’ituł la!

ch’-	ituł	la
CH’-	kick	NEG.IMP
someone	kicks it	don’t
‘Don’t kick it/him (dog, child)!’		

(3.10b) Nch’u ch’estetl’

nch’u	ch’-	z-	tetl’
NEG	CH’-	NEG-	kick.NEG
we are not kicking it			
‘We don’t kick it.’			

Two reasons could explain this behavior. For one, it might be possible that the object marking with the human indefinite works analogously to object marking with a first person plural subject; thus, the presence of any *ch’-* subject pronoun would

imply an unmarked object. On the other hand, it also might be possible that no *b*-pronoun is present because, even though indefinite, the subject (human) ranks higher than the object.

The problem is that these constructions are not very frequent, and even in elicitations, speakers oftentimes have the tendency to avoid them. The few verb forms I do have in the corpus all look like (3.10), but it is quite possible that this is not representative.

### 3.1.3 *Incorporated subjects*

We mentioned in chapter 1 that Dena'ina is an incorporating language in the sense that a nominal or sometimes adverbial stem makes up part of the verb theme, while being part of the verb word at the same time. It is not quite clear how productive noun incorporation is in Dena'ina. Not every noun stem (or adverbial stem, for that matter) can be incorporated, instead, there is a rather small class of incorporates (see Tenenbaum 1978:161-171 for an extensive, if not quite complete list). Quite possibly, incorporation is slowly disappearing. I have not had problems eliciting common verb forms where the incorporate might be lexicalized, such as in (3.11). However, when I tried to elicit more unusual cases of noun incorporation, such as (3.12), speakers offered only a phrase without an incorporate.

(3.11a) Luk'eldax.

lu- k'eldax  
hand- wash  
'S/he is washing his/her hands.'

(3.11b) Nank'eldax.

nan- k'eldax  
face- wash  
'S/he is washing his/her face.'

(3.12a) An. Evan (1976d:52)

Tiqin ghin vech' dajeghyinelyax.  
tiqin ghini v- ch' da- jegh- y- inelyax  
wolf the BO- to LEX- ear- YS- move.PL.O  
the wolf towards him he moved his ears back and forth  
'The wolf moved his ears back and forth to him.'

(3.12b)elicited

Tiqin dejegha nughelyax  
tiqin d- jegha nughelyax  
wolf REFL.POSS- ear move.PL.O.ITER  
the wolf his own ears he moved them back and forth

‘The wolf moved his ears back and forth.’

Moreover, the incorporate stem sometimes differs from the non-incorporated one. One example of this is (3.12), where the free noun is bisyllabic due to the presence of the possessive suffix *-(‘)a*, while the incorporate stem cannot be overtly possessed and is therefore monosyllabic. In other cases, the form of incorporated and free stem might be identical, but the meaning is not, although it is still similar. Consider the verb form *yus shetndeltush* ‘I was running ahead’, which contains the incorporate *shet*, ‘running’. The free stem *shet* has the meaning ‘speed’.

Incorporated and free stem are not mutually exclusive, as shown in (3.13):

(3.13) Both free and incorporated stem (An. Evan 1976b:53)<sup>5</sup>

Vin*ŋ*i tak’i*ŋ*ggat.  
vin*ŋ*i ta- k’i*ŋ*ggat  
water water- handle.LRO  
water he dipped some  
‘He dipped some water.’

Interestingly, the nominal incorporates in Dena’ina (this, of course, does not hold true for the adverbial ones) truly have argument status, as they show up in complementary distribution with pronominal affixes.

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<sup>5</sup> It was pointed out to me (Serzisko, p.c.) that this might be due to the fact that the incorporate and the free stem are not related forms. Other examples of this kind of behavior include the sentence in (i), but again, the incorporate and the free stem are quite different from each other:

(i) Pete (2003:167)  
*Yets’ena ghini tsaytnatset, (...)*  
y- ts’ena ghini tsa- ytnatset  
Y.Poss- skull this head- club  
its skull bone he clubbed its head  
‘He clubbed its head (with a paddle) (...)

The question of whether the co-occurrence of incorporates and co-referential free noun stems is a regular phenomenon in Dena’ina cannot be resolved without a larger corpus.

The *y-* prefix in the verb form in the preceding example, incidentally, refers to the paddle that is used for hitting the skull.

(3.14a) Pete (1996:4)

Ch'u kiq'u ggagga iqu kitnezyit dghelay ken.

ch'u	kiq'u	ggagga	iqu
and	next	brown.bear	for
and	once again	brown bear	for

ki-	tnayit	dghelay	ken
dog-	chase	mountain	flat
they chased with dogs		in the foothills	

'And then once again they chased a bear with dogs in the foothills of the mountains.'

Note that there is no postpositional phrase referring to dogs in (3.14a); the adjunction of this postpositional phrase to (14) was rejected by speakers:

(3.14b)elicited

*yeł	kitnayit
with it (=dog)	they chased with dogs

The same holds true for direct objects, although there is no change of position if the incorporate serves as direct object. However, an incorporate functioning as direct object excludes a pronominal in the same function:

(3.15a) Al. Evan (1976b:56)

huchiduchet  
hu- chi- duchet  
up- head- handle.SRO  
'he lifted his head'

(3.15b)elicited

\*huychiduchet

(3.15c) elicited

\*huchiyduchet

It has been shown that Dena'ina incorporates are in complementary distribution with pronominal affixes. If an argument slot is filled by an incorporate, a co-referential pronominal prefix is not permitted. However, free noun phrases that are co-referential to the incorporated argument are allowed, just as free noun phrases that are co-referential to pronominal prefixes are permitted. One example of this

was already seen in (3.13), here repeated as (3.16). In that example, the incorporate functions as direct object. The free noun phrase *vin̄ki* is co-referential to the incorporate *ta-*.

(3.16) incorporate and co-referential NP (An. Evan 1976b:53)

Vin̄ki tak'ɪl̄ggat.

vin̄ki ta- 'ɪl̄ggat  
water water- dip

'He dipped some water.'

Thus, we have seen that incorporates can fill positions in the argument structure of verbs and postpositions. They are in complementary distribution with pronominal prefixes, but they are not in complementary distribution with free noun phrases, just like pronominal prefixes. However, there is one more thing that has to be said about Dena'ina incorporates and their status.

Dena'ina, as do some other Northern Athabascan languages (cf. Axelrod 1990, Wilhelm 1992, Cook and Wilhelm 1998), has subject incorporation with transitive verbs, thus incorporation of the A argument.<sup>6</sup> In Mithun's (1984:875) typology, this case is not mentioned, while in Baker (1988:81), it is explicitly excluded and not considered to be incorporation (although it is not resolved what this case might be instead). As morphological material belonging to the verb word may occur in front of the incorporate, as it forms a phonological unit with the rest of the verb, and as at least in some cases the incorporate form significantly differs from the free form, we will consider these to be true incorporates. Let us have a look at an example of this:

(3.17) incorporated subject (Nicolie 1976:7)

Hn̄ghalten ts'u ɫuq'u chidliqubeghiʔik.

hn̄ghalten ts'u ɫuq'u chi- dli- qub- ghiʔik  
it was frozen and all death- ice QBO- it killed them  
it was frozen and all the cold killed them

'Everything was frozen and cold killed everybody.'

The prefix *chi-* is an adverbial prefix of position 17. *Chi-* cannot occur in isolation, it has to be prefixed to a verb word. It is part of all verb themes that have to do with

<sup>6</sup> Languages that exhibit subject incorporation include, but possibly are not restricted to: Koyukon (Axelrod 1990, Cook & Wilhelm 1998), Carrier, Chipewyan, Sarcee, Slave (Wilhelm 1992, Cook & Wilhelm 1998), Lower Tanana (Tuttle, p.c.), Tanacross (Holton, p.c.) and Beaver (own fieldwork).

killing or dying, and the intervention of lexical material between *chi-* and the direct object pronoun *qub-* is not permitted in any case. Only other bound morphemes, and a rather small number at that, may occur between adverbial *chi-* and the direct object pronoun: *nu-* iterative, *n-* distributive, and the incorporates. Thus, it is quite clear that the root *dli-* ‘ice, cold’ is part of the verb word and not a separate noun that occurs in the same intonational phrase as the word.

The question now is what syntactic function is filled by *dli-*, if the subject function is to be excluded, as proposed by Baker (1988). It was suggested to me that it might be regarded as an ‘adverbial’ incorporate, indicating that ‘something killed people in a cold way’. However, the object marking does not support this hypothesis.

All the instances of *b-* or *qub-* as a direct object prefix we have seen so far have two things in common: There is an overt subject pronominal prefix that is not *q-* ‘third person human plural’, and the object referent ranks higher – in either salience or inherent agency – than the subject referent.<sup>7</sup>

In all publications dealing with incorporation – and specifically, with transitive subject incorporation – in Athabaskan languages (e.g. Axelrod 1991, Wilhelm 1992, Thompson 1996a, Cook and Wilhelm 1998, Rice 2000, Tuttle in preparation), the fact is stressed that the incorporate is judged by the speakers to be low in animacy. This is exactly the constellation we see in (3.17), if only we assume that *dli-* functions as subject.<sup>8</sup> The object is human non-singular, thus ranking higher than the subject. As to the other condition we have observed, the necessity of an overt subject: There is no overt subject *prefix* in the verb form in (3.17), but if we consider *dli-* filling the argument position, we have an overt subject *marker*. By assuming that Dena’ina has incorporated transitive subjects, we can maintain our claim that *b-* and *qub-* as direct object markers can only occur if there is an overt subject marker within the verb word, and never with unmarked (or *q-* marked) subjects.<sup>9</sup> This second claim will be validated in the following subsection.

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<sup>7</sup> Cook and Wilhelm (1998:54) point out that incorporated subjects in Athabaskan are never animate or human, resulting in a prototypical low agentivity of incorporated subjects.

<sup>8</sup> It will be shown in the following sections that *b-* never occurs if the subject is unmarked third person.

<sup>9</sup> This, by the way, is not necessarily true for other Athabaskan languages. Tuttle (in preparation: 7) points out that the Salcha dialect of Tanana requires *y-* objects if there is an incorporated transitive subject.

### 3.1.4 Third person subjects

We have discussed in great detail the strategies of object marking if the subject is not unmarked third person. Let us turn now to third person subjects. This is exactly the situation where Navajo and other Athabascan languages show the *yi-/bi-* alternation<sup>10</sup>. And here Dena'ina most certainly differs from other languages. Consider (3.18):

(3.18) third person subject > third person object

(a) Yenghiʔan.

Y-    nghiʔan

YO-  look.at

‘S/he looked at him/her.’

(b) \*Benghiʔan.

(c) \*Nghiʔan.

In Chapter 2, the reasons for the ungrammaticality of (3.18c) have been shown: Seeing requires a direct object, and Dena'ina always overtly fills all argument positions, by free noun phrases or by bound pronominals, and sometimes by both. As neither an object prefix nor a free NP are present in (3.18c), this sentence was not considered to be understandable.

From the viewpoint of the Apachean languages it comes as a surprise that (3.18b) is also not permitted. (3.18b) might not always be the preferred construction as opposed to (3.18a), but the number of publications dealing with the *yi-/bi-* alternation in Navajo and other Athabascan languages certainly suggests that (3.18b) be possible in these languages (Hojer 1945:197 points out that although the prefix *bi-* occurs in the Apachean languages, it is used only rarely as direct object and occurs more frequently in postpositional object position). In Dena'ina, however, it is not. *B-* cannot be used if both subject and object are third person. Speaker intuition in this case clearly tallies with corpus analysis. In a corpus of 400 non-elicited verb forms with a third person referent acting on another third person referent, I have only once seen something like (3.18b). Speakers presented with that

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<sup>10</sup> The *yi-/bi-* alternation in the Apachean languages has been described extensively, see Jung (1999) for an overview. Under certain circumstances, the object marker *bi-* may be used in the Apachean languages instead of the default object marker *yi-*. The prefixes *yi-* and *bi-* are cognate to Dena'ina *y-* and *b-*, but their function is quite different, as shown in chapters 3 and 4.

particular sentence always considered it ungrammatical.<sup>11</sup> *B-* as a direct object is plainly not allowed if the subject of the sentence is also third person, just as *y-* is not permitted with a non-third person subject.

The number of both subject and object do not influence this behavior. We have seen that the prefix *q-* can indicate non-singular for both subject and object. From a logical point of view, four possibilities exist:

- i. Both subject and object are singular, resulting in an unmarked subject and a *y-* marked object.
- ii. The subject is singular and the object is plural, resulting in an unmarked subject and a *q-* marked object.
- iii. The subject is plural, the object is singular, resulting in the subject marked by *q-* and the object marked by *y-*, which yields the portmanteau *qey-*.
- iv. Both subject and object are plural, resulting in the subject marked by *q-* and the object marked either by *y-*, which again yields the portmanteau *qey-*, or the object is marked also by *q-*.

All these constellations are presented in (3.19):

(3.19a) singular subject and singular object

Yeghiʔan.

*y-*     $\emptyset$ -    ghiʔan  
YO-    $\emptyset$ S-   look.at

‘She looked at him.’

(3.19b) singular subject and plural object

Hghiʔan.

*q-*     $\emptyset$ -    ghiʔan  
QO-    $\emptyset$ S-   look.at

‘She looked at them.’

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<sup>11</sup> This raises, of course, the question why the form occurred in the first place. I assume that it is a mistake on the side of the speaker.

(3.19c) plural subject and singular (or plural) object

Qeyghiʔan.  
*qey-*            ghiʔan  
QS:YO-        look.at  
‘They looked at him.’

(3.19d) plural subject and plural object: *q-q-*

Qehghiʔan.  
*q-*    *q-*    ghiʔan  
Q-    Q-    see  
‘They looked at them.’

Thus, *y-* marking indicates that both subject and object are singular or underspecified with respect to number, while *q-* can mark both (or either of) the subject and the object as plural. As opposed to other languages, such as described by Gunlogson (2001), *qey-* is not ambiguous, if the object referent is [+human]. *Qey-* is used whenever the subject is non-singular and the object unspecified to number. If both subject and object are non-singular and human, they are both marked by *q-*, as demonstrated in (3.19d).

In many Athabaskan languages, number marking is non-obligatory and comparatively rare (Rice 2000). This cannot be said about Dena’ina. Although both nominal and verbal plural marking only apply to humans and dogs, they are in these cases obligatory. In the verbal system, it is usually sufficient if plurality is expressed by any means, as long as it is expressed at all. If a referent is human and non-singular, this non-singularity has to be expressed somehow, either by pronominal prefixes, by the distributive marker *n-* or by verb stems indicating non-singular for either subject or object.

This shows that *q-* ‘third person non-singular subject or object’ truly has status as an ‘unmarked’ argument prefix. If *q-* in subject function were to be considered marked, it would trigger a *b-* singular object prefix or a *qub-* object prefix. It could not co-occur with a *y-* or a *q-* object prefix. The object pronominal triggered by *q-* subject suggests this prefix has the same distribution as unmarked ( $\emptyset$ -) subject.

What about *q-* objects, though? In the beginning of this chapter, we saw that a *q-* object can be used with first person plural subjects (example (3.2), here repeated

as (3.20a)). We have seen in the preceding sections that *q-* object also occurs if the subject is unmarked third person or also *q-* (cf. (20b) and (20c), respectively). Examples (20d, e, and f) show that *q-* object is not possible if the subject is indefinite, non-human or Areal.

(3.20a) first person plural subject *ch'*, object *q-*

Ch'ehghiʔan.

*ch'*    *q-*    ghiʔan

CHʔ- QO- look.at

'We looked at them.'

(3.20b) singular subject and plural object

Hghiʔan.

*q-*     $\emptyset$ -    ghiʔan

QO-  $\emptyset$ S- look.at

'She looked at them.'

(3.20c) plural subject and plural object: *q-q-*

Qehghiʔan.

*q-*    *q-*    ghiʔan

QO- QS- look.at

'They looked at them.'

(3.20d) non-human subject (elicited)

??Deghi ʔuq'u qeyu'eʔ ghuda ch'u (...)

deg	hi	ʔuq'u	<i>q-</i>	<i>y-</i>	u'eʔ	ghuda	ch'u
-----	----	-------	-----------	-----------	------	-------	------

teeth		all	QO-	YS-	bite	because	and
-------	--	-----	-----	-----	------	---------	-----

his teeth		all	they	bit it		because	and
-----------	--	-----	------	--------	--	---------	-----

Intended: 'Because it bit them...'

Instead: 'Because they bit it...'

(3.20e) indefinite subject *k'*- (elicited)

\*Hełch' ch'u q'u yach'u quk'ełch'ish.

Hełch'	ch'u	q'u	yach'u	<i>q</i> -	<i>k'</i> -	łch'ish.
evening	and	then	thus	QO-	INDEF.S-	be.windy
by evening	and	then	thus	something	was	windy to them

Intended: 'By evening, it was windy to them.'

(3.20f) Incorporated subject (elicited)

??Hnghalten ch'u łuq'u chidliqughil'ik.

hnghalten	ch'u	łuq'u	chi-	<i>dli-</i>	<i>q</i> -	ghi'ik
it was frozen	and	all	death-	ice	QO-	it killed them
it was frozen	and	all	the cold	killed	them	

Intended: 'Everything was frozen and the cold killed everybody.'

Instead: 'Everything was frozen and everybody killed the cold.'

It transpires that *q*-, both in subject and in object function, is the non-singular counterpart to unmarked ( $\emptyset$ -) subject and *y*- marked and  $\emptyset$ - marked object. If an unmarked subject is possible, a *q*- marked subject is just as possible (allowing for the number distinction, of course). If a *y*- or  $\emptyset$ - marked object is possible, a *q*- object is again just as possible. If a construction requires a *b*- marked singular object, *q*- object is not permitted. Instead, the morpheme *qub*- is required. *Qub*- is the non-singular counterpart of *b*- just as *q*- is the non-singular counterpart of *y*-/ $\emptyset$ -, and in the direct object domain, *q*- and *qub*- are just as un-exchangeable as are *y*-/ $\emptyset$ - and *b*-.

Let us recapitulate our findings about third person object marking if the subject is also third person. In these cases, the direct object is always marked by *y*-, unless it is both non-singular and deemed relevant enough to warrant a *q*- marking. A third person object, acted on by a third person subject, can thus be only encoded by *y*- and *q*-. In no case may it have the form *b*- that we have seen in cases where the subject is non-third person.

Thus, the *yi*-/*bi*-alternation as observed in other Athabaskan languages does not exist in the direct object domain in Dena'ina.<sup>12</sup> *B*- is only acceptable if the subject is non-third person, and *y*- is only acceptable if the subject is third person. The same holds true for the non-singular counterparts of these prefixes. For direct

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<sup>12</sup> It is rather ironic that most of the publications on the *y*-/*b*- alternation focus on exactly that domain, so that comparison of these languages with Dena'ina with respect to the other two domains – postpositional objects and possessors – is rendered impossible.

object marking, there is no constellation where the speaker can actually choose whether to employ *b-* or *y-*. This choice is always determined by the subject.

### 3.2 Postpositional objects

In this section, we will consider third person object marking. In Chapter 2, it was shown that the *inventory* of pronominals for encoding direct and oblique objects is nearly identical. However, the *use* of pronominal prefixes in both positions is not identical, and the distribution of *y-* and *b-* is not nearly as clear-cut for postpositional objects as it is for direct objects.

This section is organized like the preceding one, first (3.2.1) discussing third person postpositional objects if the subject is non-third person, and later on (3.2.2) dealing with third person postpositional objects if the subject is unmarked third person or third person human plural *q-*.

#### 3.2.1 Non-third person subject

In direct object marking, we saw that there is a split between first and second person subjects on the one hand and all other kind of marked subjects on the other hand: The first kind of subject triggered an unmarked direct object, the latter one a *b-* marked one. With oblique objects, this is not the case. All marked subjects, whether they be first and second person or not, require the postpositional object to be marked by *b-* (the (a)-sentences in the following examples).  $\emptyset$ - marking is not permitted for postpositional objects (as shown in the (b)-sentences). The only exception to this is if there is a free object NP adjacent to the verb form. In this case, the pattern for direct object applies: First and second person allow  $\emptyset$ - marking if there is a free object NP adjacent to the verb, while all other kinds of marked subjects do not (illustrated by the (c)-sentences).

(3.21) areal subjects

(a) areal subjects with postpositional object pronominal (Pete 1989:3)

Nichił ghu k'unde *qubet nitubdinlen*.

nichił	ghu	k'unde	<i>qub-</i>	eł	nitu-	<i>q-</i>	dinlen
nichił	there	starvation	QBO-	to	LEX-	AREAL.S-	it.came
nichił	there	famine	for them		it struck	them	

'Famine struck the people [living] in a nichil.'

- (b) areal subject, no overt postpositional object (elicited)

\**Nichił ghu k'unde et nituhdinlen.*

- (c) areal subject, free NP (elicited)

*Nichił ghu k'unde quht'ana qubet nituhdinlen.*

nichił	ghu	k'unde	quht'ana	qub-	et
nichił	there	starvation	people	QBO-	to
nichił	here	starvation	people		to them

nituh	q-	dinlen
LEX-	AREAL.S-	come
it came		

'Famine struck the people in a nichil.'

(3.22) *y*- subjects

- (a) with postpositional object pronominal (An. Evan 1976b:47)

*Vegh dayulgguk.*

v-	egh	da-	y-	ulgguk
BO-	with	into-	YS-	move.PF
with him		it got in		

'It (seal) got in with him.'

- (b) no object pronominal

\**Egh dayulgguk.*

- (c) with free object NP

*Chulyin vegh dayulgguk.*

chulyin	v-	egh	da-	y-	ulgguk
Raven	BO-	with	into-	YS-	move.PF
Raven	with him		it got in		

'It got in with Raven'

(3.23) first person plural

- (a) with postpositional object pronominal (Pete 2003:167)

*Beqa ch'itujesh.*

*b- qa cb'- itujesh*  
BO- subsisting.on 1PL.S- survive.FUT  
subsisting on that we survived

‘We could survive on that.’

- (b) no object pronominal (elicited)

*\*Qa ch'itujesh.*

- (c) with free object NP (elicited)

*Ǝiq'a qa ch'itujesh.*

*Ǝiq'a qa cb'- itujesh*  
fish subsisting.on 1PL.S- survive  
fish on it we survived

‘We could survive on fish.’

(3.24) second person singular

- (a) with postpositional object pronominal (Pete 1989:7)

*BeƎ idinlgguk.*

*b- eƎ idi- n- lgguk*  
BO- by LEX- 2SG.S- move  
by it you were walking

‘You passed by it.’

- (b) no object pronominal

*\*eƎ idinlgguk*

(c) with free object NP

Hdakat eł idinlgguk.

<i>hdakat</i>	<i>eł</i>	idi-	<i>n-</i>	lgguk
door	by	LEX-	2SG.S-	move
door	by	you were walking		

‘You passed by its door.’

If we only considered the (c)-sentences of (3.21-3.24), we would come to the conclusion that postpositional object marking is identical to direct object marking if the subject is non-third person. However, the (a)-sentences suggest a difference, because in those examples without overt object noun phrases (and in all others in the corpus), the object prefix is obligatory. As mentioned before, this constitutes one of the main differences between direct and postpositional object marking.

The solution to this problem is quite simple. Dena’ina seems to have a strategy to avoid postpositions without an overt object. The shape of the object, free NP or pronominal prefix, is irrelevant; the only thing that matters is that this slot is filled by something. ‘Naked’ postpositions, that is, postpositions with no overt object, do not occur. If the object slot is already filled by a free noun phrase, a first and second person subject triggers  $\emptyset$ - objects, while indefinite, Areal, non-human and incorporate subjects trigger *b*- objects, indicating that the object ranks higher than the subject, just as the *b*- marking does for direct objects.

Thus, the choice of postpositional object prefix with non-third person subject depends on two things. First, the same hierarchies that we saw for direct objects influence the object marking: First and second person subjects allow  $\emptyset$ -marked postpositional objects, while all other marked subjects do not, and instead trigger *b*- marking. However, if there is no free object NP immediately preceding the postpositional phrase, the object has to be marked pronominally. As *y*- seems to be no choice for a third person object pronoun with a marked subject, the only logical possibility is *b*-.

### 3.2.2 *Third person subject*

In the preceding section, we have seen that there is a slight difference between direct and oblique object marking with non-third person subjects. However, the two systems also differ with respect to marking with third person subjects, and this

difference has a bigger impact on the participant marking system of Dena'ina than the one we just observed.

If a free object NP precedes the verb word, the postpositional object marking is similar to the marking pattern with direct objects, resulting in an unmarked object in about two thirds of all cases, and *y-* marking in all other cases. Thus, postpositional third person object marking is identical to the marking of direct objects, if a third person subject is acting on a third person object and there is a free object NP immediately adjacent to the verb word. No difference between the systems can be found at this point.

(3.25a) full object NP without object prefix (Pete 2003:165)

I take that woman, *dek'isen ghunen ghe nigheshuyi ghuda qubeł tayeshyu.*

I take that woman	<i>dek'isen</i>	<i>ghunen</i>	$\emptyset$ -	<i>ghe</i>
woman		that	$\emptyset\emptyset$ -	to
that woman				to her

<i>nigheshuyi</i>	<i>ghuda</i>	<i>qub-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>tayeshyu.</i>
-------------------	--------------	-------------	-----------	------------------

I.will.go.there	because	QBO-	with	I.went
-----------------	---------	------	------	--------

the one I was going to marry	because of	with them	I went
------------------------------	------------	-----------	--------

‘I had brought that woman, I had gone with them because of the woman that I was going to marry.’

(3.25b) full object NP with object prefix (Pete 1996:4)

Betukda ghun yegheyedulnik ch'u yegguna yiłyeł.

<i>betukda</i>	<i>ghun</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>ghe-</i>	<i>yedulnik</i>
his.father	that.one	YO-	to-	move.hand
his father	that	he reached down to him		

<i>yegguna</i>	<i>yiłyel</i>
his hand	grab.O
his hand	he grabbed it

‘He reached down and grabbed his father’s hand.’

In (3.25), we see two examples of the postposition *ghe* ‘to’. Both times, the postposition is preceded by a full noun phrase; furthermore, both noun phrases have the same structure, N+Det. However, the pronominal marking in the two examples differs. In (3.25a), we see the more frequent case with an unmarked postposition, while in (3.25b) the postposition is marked by *y-*. This tallies with the results we have seen in Chapter 2, where it was suggested that this phenomenon is due to

specificity and definiteness issues. Thus, the system illustrated by the examples in (3.25) is nothing new.<sup>13</sup>

This changes as soon as we consider cases where there is no adjacent free object NP present. If the system were identical to direct object marking, we would expect postpositional objects without adjacent NP to be marked by *y-* in all cases. A typical example of this constellation would be (3.26):

(3.26) postpositional object with third person subject (Pete 1996:4)

(a) Ch'u yeq'edultlet.

ch'u *y-* *q'e-* dultlet  
and YO- on- jump.up  
and he jumped up on it

'And he jumped onto it (rock).'

(b) \*Ch'u *q'e* dultlet.

Note that  $\emptyset$ - marking without a co-referential, immediately adjacent NP is not permitted, because of the avoidance of naked postpositions. In the context of direct object marking, however, we noticed something else: Dena'ina also avoids to have both an unmarked third person subject and an unmarked third person object, so that (3.18c), here repeated as (3.27), is an ungrammatical sentence.

(3.27) \*Nghil'an.

Intended: 'S/he looked at him/her.'

Considering this, it is not surprising that unmarked third person postpositional objects that are not represented by a free NP adjacent to the postposition do not occur in natural speech. Both the avoidance of naked postpositions and the avoidance of two unmarked participants within one verb form render (3.26b) unlikely. However, there is one big difference between direct object marking and postpositional object marking with unmarked third person subjects. The only choice for the third person direct object of a third person subject was *y-* marking; a *b-* marked object is not possible in this constellation. Observe, however, the data in (3.28):

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<sup>13</sup> In some cases, as we will see in the following sections, it may happen that the object is encoded by both a full noun phrase and a *b-* prefix. This case will not be considered in this context. It will be assumed that the other principles discussed here can be 'stacked' in order to explain these rare cases.

(3.28) postpositional object marked by *b-*

(a) Beq'atl'uyiḷges. (Pete 1996:3)

*b-*    *q'a-*                    tl'uy- y-            ḷges  
 BO-   into.hole            back- YO-        move.O.violently  
 into the notch            he jammed it back

'He jammed it (spearhead) back into the notch.'

(b) Bek'uyiḷdeḷ. (ibid.)

*b-*    *k'u-*                    y-            ḷdeḷ  
 BO-   away.from            YO-        handle.PL.O  
 away from it            he pulled it (spear and detached spearhead)

'He pulled it away from it.'

Strikingly, the object marking in (3.28) is nothing out of the ordinary. In a corpus of some 600 verb forms with third person subject and object, it turns out that about a quarter of all third person postpositional objects with third person subjects are marked by *b-* if there is no co-referential object NP within the same clause. Even if there is, it seems to be possible to *b-* mark the postpositional object, even though it is done rarely. (This can be seen in the first column in table 3.2.)

		3S	
		+ NP	-NP
DO	Ø-	80	2
	Y-	60	168
	B-		
OO	Ø-	63	
	Y-	32	153
	B-	4	44

Table 3.2: Third person object marking with third person subjects

Table 3.2 shows the distribution of third person object pronominals if the subject is also third person for both direct (DO) and oblique (OO) objects. Within the domain of pronominal prefixes, the rows of the table indicate the way of object marking: unmarked, *y-* marked and *b-* marked. The columns show the difference between verb forms where a free object NP is present (+NP) and where there is none such (-NP).

Within the cells, the number of tokens of a particular constellation is displayed. Some constructions seem to be impossible or extremely rare, such as Ø-

object prefixes (both direct and postpositional) when there is no co-referential object noun phrase present. In these cases, the cells are grey shaded.

A look at the table quickly confirms what we have already seen in (3.28). While *b-* marking is most certainly not permitted for direct objects of a third person subject, this restriction does not apply for postpositional objects. In fact, about a quarter of all cases of a third person postpositional object of a third person subject are marked by *b-*. In the following sections, we will investigate the choice of either *b-* or *y-* for postpositional objects.

### *3.2.2.1 Y- and b- with postpositional objects: The extent of the problem*

If there are two morphemes that can be used to encode postpositional objects in Dena'ina, it is likely that they serve different functions or show up in different environments. One initially likely hypothesis for the examples in (3.28) was suggested in Müller (2004). The outline of the argument made there will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Both verb forms are ditransitive with a third person subject. Thus, both a direct object slot and a postpositional object slot have to be filled. The direct object slot is predictably filled by *y-*. Thus, it could be assumed that a doubling of *y-* objects, as illustrated in (3.29), is avoided in Dena'ina. Consultants asked to consider the sentences in (3.29) unanimously declared them ungrammatical, which seems to support this hypothesis.

(3.29a) \*yeq'atl'uyiɬges

(3.29b) \*yek'uyiɬdeɬ

The verb forms in (3.29) differ from the ones in (3.28) only in so far as they contain two *y-* object prefixes, instead of a *b-* postpositional object prefix and a *y-* direct object prefix.

The hypothesis would now be that *y-y-* constructions are avoided, and that in those constellations where a *y-y-* construction might occur, namely if all participants of a ditransitive verb are third person, the marking in (3.28) would be employed: Unmarked subject, *y-* marked direct object, *b-* marked postpositional object. This then could be explained by assuming that postpositional objects rank higher than direct objects with respect to agentivity. As prototypical postpositional objects in Dena'ina – recipients, goals, benefactives etc. – have more proto-agent roles than prototypical direct objects – usually patients – this argument hierarchy would be reflected by object marking, with the postpositional object being marked as more

agentive. A claim similar to this was made in Müller (2004), based on elicited data. It turns out, though, that this is not quite true.

In Table 3.3, postpositional object marking with ditransitive verbs is displayed. All the verb forms in this table are taken from narratives, so we observe natural speech here. Two things are being considered here: On the vertical level, the form of the postpositional object prefix, which may be *y-/q-* or *b-*, and on the horizontal level, the form of the direct object, which may be marked by *y-/q-*, or which may be either an incorporated object or an indefinite or Areal object. If the assumptions made above were correct, then we would expect only *b-* marking in the first column, and only *y-* marking in the second and third column, as there would be no need in the latter ones to keep different referents apart.

OO	DO	Y/Q	Incorporate	Areal/Indefinite
Y/Q		22	3	14
B		5		2

Table 3.3: Postpositional object marking in ditransitive verb forms

Quite obviously, our assumptions are not borne out by the data. In the first column, the overwhelming majority of cases displays *y-* marking instead of *b-* marking, and the same thing holds true for the second column. The cases in the third column at least display the expected tendency, even though we would have expected to see no exceptions. The cases in the first column, however, don't even show the expected tendency. In the second column, no counterexamples to our hypotheses can be seen, but then, three tokens do not constitute a valid data basis.

Before we proceed in the discussion, let us have a look at examples for each of these constellations. In (3.30), we will see utterances where the direct object is marked by *y-* and the postpositional object is marked by either *y-* (3.30a) or *b-* (3.30b). In (3.31), an example of a ditransitive verb with a *y-* marked third person postpositional object and an incorporated direct object will be shown. As shown in the table, there are no cases of a *b-* marked postpositional object with an incorporated direct object. In (3.32), we see verb forms with an indefinite direct object and a *y-* marked (3.32a) and a *b-* marked (3.32b) postpositional object.

(3.30a) both direct and postpositional object marked by *y-* (Pete 1996:9)

Ighunuydigits’.

*y-*     *gbu*     nu-     *y-*     digits’  
YO-   off     ITER-   YO-   tear.off  
off it             he tore it off again

‘He tore [the scalp] off [the bear].’

(3.30b) direct object marked by *y-*, postpositional object marked by *b-* (Al. Evan 1976:20)

Veyes va itighulnexch’ (...)

veyes   *v-*     a     *y-*     tighulnexch’  
skin   BO-   on     YO-   put.on  
skin   on it             in a way to put it on

‘The skin, all ready to put on, (...)’

(3.31) incorporated direct object and *y-* postpositional object (Pete 1977:14)

Qeyel qutałdghilkits.

*qey-*             *et*     qu-     *tat-*     dghilkits  
QS:YO-         with     out-     mat-     carry.FO  
with him             they carried the mat out

‘They carried him out on a mat (=lit. they carried out a mat with him).’

(32a) direct object *k’*, postpositional object *y-* (Pete 1989:4)

Qeydunk’dayyel.

*qey-*             du             n-     *k’*             dayyel  
QS:YO-         in.mouth     DIST-   INDEF.O-     handle.wooden.LRO  
they across the hole             they put sticks

‘They put sticks across the hole.’

(3.32b) direct object *k’*, postpositional object *b-* (An. Evan 1976b:51)

Husaghi’ey gin vek’uch’ nuk’delzex.

husaghi’ey   gin   *v-*     *k’uch’*             nu-     *k’*             delzex  
seal             the     BO-     away.from     ITER-   INDEF.O-     turn  
the seal             away from him             he turns something [his eyes]

‘The seal turned his eyes away from him.’

We see in examples (3.30-3.32) that both *y-* and *b-* postpositional object are permitted if the subject is unmarked third person and the direct object is either *y-* or indefinite *k'*. We remain agnostic, for the time being, about cases where the direct object is an incorporate, as the data basis is not sufficient to warrant any claims. Thus, we deal only with examples like (3.30) and (3.32) in the following sections.

The most likely assumption, an avoidance of *y- y-* constructions, is ruled by the data, as *y- y-* constructions are not only possible, but also even constitute the majority of cases. Also, *b-* marking is permitted in cases where the direct object is not marked by *y-* but with an indefinite. In these examples, the *b-* marking cannot be an avoidance of *y- y-*, as this construction could not result under these circumstances. A more detailed investigation of this problem will follow in the next section (3.2.2.2). Before we do that, let us have a brief look at bivalent verbs and postpositions in isolation, as the same phenomenon occurs there.

If we look in Table 3.4 at intransitive verbs where the postposition serves to introduce a second participant,<sup>14</sup> we see that they behave similarly to ditransitive verbs, inasmuch both *y-* marking and *b-* marking are possible, with a tendency to encode the postpositional object by *y-*. Also included in Table 3.4 are cases where there is a postpositional phrase that is not part of a verb word (second column). In these constructions, *y-* marking seems not to be permitted.<sup>15</sup> These cases are illustrated in (3.33), underneath Table 3.4.

	With verb	Without verb
Y	113	
B	33	4

Table 3.4: Postpositional object marking in bivalent verbs and in postpositions without verbs

(3.33) Delkittie (1976:60f.)

Veł yagheli gheli.

<i>v-</i>	<i>et</i>	yagheli	gheli
BO-	with	good	really
	with him	it was good	really

‘He was real happy.’

<sup>14</sup> In the following discussion, these verb forms will be called bivalent, as opposed to transitive (verb with direct object) and ditransitive (verb with both direct and postpositional object).

<sup>15</sup> Again, the data basis is not sufficient. As I also never managed to elicit one of these postpositional phrases without a verb form, this can only be resolved by a larger data set.

With the exception of postpositional phrases in isolation from verbs, it transpires that *y-* marking in all constellations occurs significantly more frequently than *b-* marking. Thus, *y-* marking seems to be the default case in postpositional object marking, just as it was the default case in direct object marking. The difference between the two systems is that with direct object marking, the default was at the same time the only possibility, while in the domain of postpositional object marking, a less favored choice co-exists with the default case. In the following sections, we will investigate reasons for the choice of *b-* rather than the default *y-*.

### 3.2.2.2 *Y-/b-alternation with postpositional objects: Animacy and reference tracking*

In the beginning of this chapter, the *yi-/bi-* alternation in other Athabaskan languages was mentioned. It will be shown here that in Dena'ina, the *yi-/bi-* alternation as described by Thompson (1989a, 1989b and 1996), Frishberg (1972), Hale (1973) etc. exists in the domain of postpositional object marking, while it is explicitly excluded in the domain of direct object marking.

As both ditransitive and bivalent verb forms in Dena'ina exhibit the same alternation, and as the shape of the direct object does not seem to significantly influence the shape of the postpositional object, both cases will be considered together. The last subsection will deal with postpositional objects in those cases where the postposition is not part of a verb form.

Let us consider an example of *b-* postpositional object in a bivalent verb, taken from the story about the Łi Dnay, the Glacier People. This utterance was used to find out if *y-* object marking would also be acceptable. It turned out that it was (cf. (3.34b)), and that, upon closer reflection on side of the speakers, it even was preferred.

(3.34a) oblique *b-* with unmarked subject (Pete 1978:2)

Ki	next day	benu'iju.		
ki	next day	<i>b-</i>	nu-	'iju
again	next day	BO-	ITER	move.PF
again	next day	she came back to him		

'She came back again next day.'

(3.34b) also acceptable (elicited):

Ki next day *yenu'iju*.

In (3.34), we see an example of the null-postposition. The oblique object *b-* refers to a man (with the semantic role of goal), and as this is a plain motion verb, no direct object could occur in this sentence. The subject is unmarked and refers to a woman. Still, the oblique object is marked by *b-* and not by *y-*, although this form is considered acceptable. The greater context of the story, though, explains what is going on. In (3.35), the utterances preceding (3.34a) are presented:

(3.35) greater context to the preceding example (Pete 1978:2)

(a) *Benuqeʔi nuyultlet.*

<i>b-</i>	<i>nuqeʔi</i>	<i>nu-</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>ultlet</i>	
BO-	out.of.sight	ITER-	YS-	run.PF	
	out of his sight		she	ran	

‘She ran out of sight.’

(b) *Kiq’u uk’u shtunuyilggugi iʔq’a.*

<i>kiq’u</i>	<i>b-</i>	<i>k’u</i>	<i>shtunu-</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>ilggugi</i>	<i>iʔq’a</i>
again	BO-	away.from	away-	YS-	go.PF	even
again		from him	she	got	away	even

‘Again, she went away (from him).’

(c) *Ki next day benu’iju.*

<i>ki</i>	<i>next day</i>	<i>b-</i>	<i>nu-</i>	<i>’iju</i>
again	next day	BO-	ITER	move.PF
again	next day		she	came back to him

‘She came back to him again next day.’

In the first two verb forms of (3.35), a non-human subject marked by *y-* is acting on an object; thus, marking the object by *b-* is not surprising at all. We will see in chapter 4 that the non-human *y-* subjects always trigger a *b-* marked object, whether it be direct or oblique. In (3.35c), though, a different way of participant marking is displayed. The subject is not marked by *y-* anymore (the corresponding form containing a *y-* subject would be *benunijju*), but is instead unmarked. The object marking, on the other hand, is like it was in (3.35a-b).

The object marking can best be explained out of the context of the narrative. (3.35) is taken from a story about the Glacier People, a kind of mountain spirits. In the beginning, a man and a woman live together. The woman disappears, and another woman comes to live with the man. What he doesn't know is that the second woman is not human at all, but is one of the *Łi Dnay*, the Glacier People – incidentally the ones that are responsible for the disappearance of the first woman.

In (3.35a-b), the non-humanness of the second woman is indicated by the use of *y-* subjects referring to her. Thus, the marking in those two utterances indicates that the subject is less human than the object. This does not correspond to the 'normal' way of things, a high-ranking referent acting on a low-ranking one, hence the *y-* marked subject and *b-* marked object. The same thing holds true for (3.35c). Although the *y-* marking of the woman is dropped, the man is still more animate, more human, and also more salient and relevant to the story than the woman.<sup>16</sup> Even though the difference between the two referents is not marked by the subject prefix anymore, it can still be encoded by the *b-* marked object. The choice of object pronominal here reflects the relation between the referents. By referring to her with *y-* subjects, the narrator demotes her in animacy; by referring to the man constantly with *b-* postpositional objects, the narrator promotes him in animacy.<sup>17</sup>

What if *y-* object were chosen in (3.35c), as is demonstrated in (3.36)?

(3.36) *y-* object instead of *b-* (elicited)

(a) Benuqeł'i nuyultlet.

b-	nuqeł'i	nu-	y-	ultlet	
BO-	out.of.sight	ITER-	YS-	run.PF	
	out of his sight		she ran		

'She ran out of sight.'

(b) Kiq'u uk'u shtunuyilggugi ilq'a.

kiq'u	b-	k'u	shtunu-	y-	ilggugi ilq'a	
again	BO-	away.from	away-	YS-	go.PF	even
again	from him		she got away			even

'Again, she went away (from him).'

<sup>16</sup> The subject marking in this story, as well as the choice of *y-* subject versus unmarked subject, will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, this has no impact on direct object marking; there we get *b-* objects with *y-* subjects and *y-* objects with unmarked subjects, but never *b-* objects with unmarked subjects. This supports the assumption that *b-* may under no circumstances mark the direct object of a verb containing an unmarked subject.

(c) Ki next day yenu'iju.

ki	next day	y-	nu-	'iju
again next day		YO-	ITER	move.PF
again next day		he came back to her		

'He came back to her again next day.'

If this were the encoding in the narrative, the listener would assume that subject reference switched. The woman has been encoded by *y-* subjects in the utterances preceding (3.36c), so the listener to (3.36) will assume that she is not quite as human, animate, agentive or salient as the man, the postpositional object in (3.36a-b). If the oblique object in (3.36c) is *y-* marked, however, the listener will interpret it as referring to the low-ranking referent, the woman. The man is taken to be the only other participant in the action, the subject. Thus, the encoding in (3.36c) is interpreted in the opposite way of the encoding in (3.35c).

The verb form *yenu'iju* is generally acceptable, and we have seen above that it is in fact preferred if the verb form is isolated from its narrative context. This is the case only if the object ranks lower than the subject – if the relation between object and subject is as it should be. If the object ranks higher than the subject, as in the original story, this digression from the normal pattern has to be marked, and it is marked by *b-*.

We could now look at a huge set of data to support these hypotheses, but overall, the findings will be similar to what we have seen in the paragraphs above, and to what has been described in the literature for direct objects in Navajo and other Athabascan languages.<sup>18</sup> Let us instead consider the utterances in the beginning of this chapter, with two ditransitive verbs, where the direct object was marked by *y-* and the postpositional object marked by *b-*. The striking thing in these examples, here repeated as (3.37), was that speakers did not accept versions of the same utterances containing *y-* as a postpositional object marker.

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<sup>18</sup> Note, though, that the choice of *b-* over *y-* as postpositional object prefix in Dena'ina never correlates with a change in word order, as described by Hale (1973) for Navajo and by Sandoval and Jelinek (1989) for Jicarilla Apache.

(3.37) postpositional object marked by *b-*

(a) Beq'atl'uyiḷges. (Pete 1996:3)

*b-* q'a- tl'uy- *y-* ḷges  
BO- into.hole back- YO- move.O.violently  
into the notch he jammed it back  
'He jammed it (spearhead) back into the notch.'

(b) Bek'uyiḷdeḷ. (ibid.)

*b-* k'u- *y-* ḷdeḷ  
BO- away.from YO- handle.PL.O  
away from it he pulled it  
'he pulled it away from it'

(3.38) refused versions of (3.39) with *y-* instead of *b-*

(a) \*yeq'atl'uyiḷges

(b) \*yek'uyiḷdeḷ

Let us begin with the (b)- sentences. In these two verb forms, we have three referents that are not on a par with respect to animacy or agency. The subject of both verb forms is a human being, the direct object is a spear, and the postpositional object is a bear. Thus, the following ranking of participants can be assumed for (3.37b):

(3.39) man > bear > spear (ranking of referents with respect to animacy)  
agent > recipient > patient (ranking of semantic roles)  
S > P > O (ranking of syntactic functions)

In this case, the ranking of the referents directly reflects the ranking of the syntactic participants, as described by Dowty (1991) or Primus (1999). The postpositional object is both more animate and more prominent (in the syntactic sense) than the direct object. Thus, *b-* marking applies, indicating that the postpositional object may not necessarily be more animate or prominent than the subject, but at least that it is more so than the direct object. The participant marking thus reflects both the syntactic and semantic ranking of the referents.

Why, though, would (3.38b) be considered ungrammatical? After all, postpositional objects are syntactically more prominent than direct objects due to their more exposed position in the verb word, and their, by virtue of their encoding,

more agentive thematic roles. Not surprisingly, the syntactic prominence oftentimes correlates with differences in animacy, so that it can be claimed that the average postpositional object usually ranks higher on the animacy scale than the average direct object. This cannot explain the preference of *b*- marking over *y*- marking in these constellations.

The solution to the current problem seems to be reference tracking.

If the encoding in (3.37b) is changed to the one in (3.38b), the whole passage becomes unclear. Let us have a look at the utterances surrounding (3.37b):

(3.40) encoding in the greater context of the story (Pete 1996:3)

(a) Ggagga yiggat q'u yeł nutdenesh.

ggagga	<i>y<sub>BB</sub></i> -	$\emptyset$ <sub>qn</sub> -	iggat	q'u	<i>y<sub>sp</sub></i> -	eł	nutdenesh.
brown.bear	YO-	$\emptyset$ S-	stab	now	YO-	with	he pulled back
brown bear	he stabbed			and	with it		he pulled back

'He would stab the brown bear and he pulled it back.'

(b) Ts'en ghini ghu uqa yehnidelyash dyisen.

ts'en	ghini	ghu	uqa	<i>y<sub>sh</sub></i> -	hnidelyash	dyisen
bone	this	there	for.purpose	YO-	detach	he made it thus
this bone	there	for that		it detached		he made it thus

'He fixed that bone so it would detach.'

(c) Beyiłtl'as hnuq'u, ts'en ghini ch'a'iltuk', bek'uyiłdeł.

<i>b<sub>bb</sub></i> -	<i>y<sub>sp</sub></i> -	ıtl'ets '		hnuq'u		ts'en	ghini
BO-	YS-	hit		when		bone	this
it hit it				when		this bone	
ch'a-	$\emptyset$ -	'iltuk'	<i>b<sub>bb</sub></i> -	k'u-	<i>y<sub>sp</sub></i> -	$\emptyset$ <sub>qn</sub> -	ıłdeł
out-	$\emptyset$ S-	run	BO-	from-	YO-	$\emptyset$ S-	handle.PL.O
it shot out			he pulled them (parts of spear) away from it (bear)				

'When it hit the bear that bone shot out and he pulled it away.'

(d) Q'u daghiłkugh chibeyił'ish.

q'u	daghiłkugh	chi-	<i>b<sub>bb</sub></i> -	<i>y<sub>sp</sub></i> -	ıł'ish
now	it is big	death-	BO-	YS-	kill.PL.O
right away		it killed	would kill them		

'It would kill it right away.'

In the stretch of text shown in (3.40), four referents have to be kept apart: the man (Quch' Nushjun = QN), the brown bear (BB), the spear (SP) and the spear head (SH). In some utterances, for example in the second verb phrase in (3.40c), full noun phrases are used to disambiguate (*ts'en ghini ch'a'iltuk'*), but in other examples, disambiguation is achieved solely by pronominal prefixes. This happens in several cases in (3.40). In the second verb form of (3.40a), the *y*-marking indicates that it is the spear that is being pulled back, and not the bear (this reading was suggested by one speaker for the invented verb form *bet nutdenesh*). Another example for that is the verb form we have been considering all along, *bek'uyitdet* in (3.40c). The spear (last mentioned in the second verb form in (3.40a)) and the bear (last mentioned in the first verb form in (3.40a)) are about equally salient. If *y*- were employed in this example, the verb form is just as likely to be interpreted as 'he pulled the spearhead away from the spear'. *B*- by definition encodes referents that rank high with respect to animacy, while *y*-, as we have seen in the preceding example, does not do that.

In light of this, it does not come as a surprise that speakers clearly prefer the version with *b*- referring to the bear to the version of *y*- referring to the bear. While both utterances are understandable, the original one – with *b*- marking – exactly reflects the relation between the participants. The same cannot be said for the constructed verb form with *y*- marking.

Let us turn now to (3.37a) and (3.38a). Here, the two object referents rank equally high on the animacy hierarchy. Again, a look at the greater context of these examples – actually, at the two utterances preceding the stretch of text we have seen in (3.40) – helps to understand the encoding:

(3.41) encoding in greater context (Pete 1996:2f.)

(a) Ggagga ghini ts'en niq'ach' beq'un hnalqeyi ka'a t'ghit'a.

ggagga	ghini	ts'en	niq'ach'	<i>b</i> <sub>qn</sub> -	q'un
brown.bear	these	bone	double-ended	B.Poss-	spearhead
brown bears	these	bone	double-ended	his	spearhead
hnalqeyi	t'ghit'a				
embedded	it was				
embedded	it was				

'He had a big double-ended spear with sharpened bone heads for those brown bears.'

(b) Q'aditin ghini bich'aqilyuh dyisen.

q'aditin ghini *b<sub>sp</sub>* ch'a- *q-* Ø<sub>qn-</sub> ilyuh dyisen  
 spear that BO- out- AREAL.O- ØS- gauge he made it  
 spear that he gauged out a notch in it

'He drilled a notch right into that spear.'

(c) Ch'u yiyah ch'u beq'atl'uyiłges.

ch'u *y<sub>sh-</sub>* iyah ch'u  
 and YO- spit.on and  
 and he spit on it and

*b<sub>sp-</sub>* q'a- tl'u- *y<sub>sh-</sub>* Ø<sub>qn-</sub> łges  
 BO- into.hole- back- YO- ØS- move.O.violently  
 he jammed it into the notch

'And he spit on it (the spear-head) and jammed it into the notch (of the spear).'

We have said above that agency cannot be the explanation for the marking in (3.41), as there is one high-ranking referent (Quch' Nushjun) and two (or three, if we want to include the hole, encoded by the Areal in (3.41a)) low-ranking, inanimate referents. No asymmetry in agency between the direct and the postpositional object can be observed in (3.41b). However, it is still necessary to keep track of all the referents.

A postpositional *y-* marking in the second verb form in (3.41c) would imply that the direct object *y-* in *yiyah* and the postpositional object *y-* in *yeq'atl'uyiłges* would be co-referential. The use of *b-* as a postpositional object marker seems to block this reading, marking disjunct reference between the direct object of the first verb form and the postpositional object of the second one. The use of both *b-* and *y-* within a certain stretch of text thus helps speakers to track referents. In most cases, *b-* is assigned to the more salient referent, but as salience is notoriously difficult to measure<sup>19</sup>, this cannot always be determined without doubt.

We have seen in the preceding sections that *y-* is the default postpositional object prefix, just as it is the default direct object prefix. In the domain of

<sup>19</sup> The approach proposed by Thompson (1989a, b) for Koyukon and Navajo would predict the opposite marking in this example: If we took, as they do, referential distance as a determining criterion, the spearhead would be more salient than the spear, so that the spear would have to be encoded by *y-*, which was not approved of by the speakers. Thus, I will not try to measure salience as Thompson and others have done, but rely on speakers' judgments to determine whether a particular referent is 'important' or not.

postpositional object marking, both *y-* and *b-* may be used. *B-* may be employed under three conditions, which may or may not overlap: It may be used if there are three or more clearly ranked referents (as in (3.37b)), it may be used if the postpositional object is considered to be equally important as or more important than the subject of a bivalent verb (as in example (3.34)), or if the speaker wants to pronominally distinguish several referents within a stretch of text, assigning *b-* postpositional object prefixes to one referent and *y-* postpositional prefixes to another one.

Although this reference-tracking function does not seem to be one of the main functions of the different object pronominal prefixes, there are some examples to be found. In the next paragraphs, we will briefly look at one of them, an excerpt of the story Nini Ggagga Sukdu'a.

In the stretch of text we will investigate here, there are three main referents: The porcupine, co-indexed with *p*, the brown bear, co-indexed with *bb*, and a spruce tree, co-indexed with *s*. Note that both Porcupine and Brown Bear can occur in subject and object position. To clarify relations, unmarked subjects will be indicated by  $\emptyset$ -, and also be co-indexed with the referents.

(3.42) *y-* vs. *b-* postpositional objects (Delkittie 1976:61f.)

(a) Yeł diqa ghilgguk.

<i>y</i> <sub>p</sub> -	eł	diqa	$\emptyset$ <sub>bb</sub> -	ghilgguk
YO-	to	up	$\emptyset$ S-	walk.PF
	with him	up it	he	went

'He climbed up to him.'

(b) Nini ghin gu q'u vetsah gheyuł.

nini	ghin	gu	q'u	<i>v</i> <sub>bb</sub> -	tsah	$\emptyset$ <sub>p</sub> -	gheyuł
porcupine	that	here	now	BO-	ahead.of	$\emptyset$ S-	move.PROG
that porcupine		right here		ahead of him		he	kept going

'The porcupine kept going just ahead of him.'

(c) Nini gun yudeq gheli yetsi ghu dilgguk ch'vala ghin.

nini	gun	yudeq	gheli	<i>y</i> <sub>s</sub> -	tsi	ghu
porcupine	this	up	really	YO-	top	there
this porcupine		up	really	there to the	top	

Ø <sub>p</sub> -	dilgguk	ch'vala	ghin
ØS-	move.PF	spruce.tree	that
	he went	spruce	that

‘The porcupine went clear to the top of the spruce.’

(d) Ggagga gin ki vetl'uyeh yudeq gheli yik'jeh.

ggagga	gin	ki	ʋ <sub>p</sub> -	tl'uyeh	yudeq	gheli
brown.bear	this	too	BO-	behind	up	really
the brown bear		too	behind him		up	really

y <sub>p</sub> -	Ø <sub>bb</sub> -	ik'jeh
YO-	ØS-	hit
he slapped at him		

‘The bear came up right behind him and slapped at him.’

(3.42) is taken from the end of the story. At the point where this excerpt begins, Porcupine is sitting in a spruce tree. Brown Bear comes up to him and threatens to throw him down. Porcupine is not scared and replies that Brown Bear should just come and try, because he (Porcupine) would instead throw the Brown Bear down. Thus challenged, Brown Bear starts to climb up the tree. Note that Porcupine in this utterance (3.42a) is encoded by postpositional object prefix *y-*.

(3.42b) shows the Porcupine retreating from the Bear. The syntactic roles have been reversed; now the Porcupine functions as subject and the Bear as postpositional object. However, the Bear is still in the center of the narrative. This is indicated mostly by the absence of a full NP referring to him – note that there is one co-referential with Porcupine – and by the fact that he is marked by postpositional *b-*.

In the next utterance, an inanimate referent occurs in the postpositional object position. Thus, the choice of *y-* as object pronoun can be interpreted as being due the difference in both animacy and agency between the subject Porcupine and the object spruce. The latter one is being re-introduced by the full NP *ch'vala ghin* as an afterthought.

Because of that re-introduction, the spruce is still salient in (3.42d), being the last-mentioned referent. If the object of the postposition *tl'uyeh* were *y-* now, the whole utterance would in all likelihood be interpreted as “the bear came up behind the spruce and slapped it”. By the use of the *b-* prefix, it is made clear that the referent of the pronoun has to be especially animate and relevant for the narrative (cf. Thompson 1989a on the notion of relevance), which holds true for Porcupine,

but certainly not for the spruce. Thus, the use of pronouns in this stretch of text nicely illustrates the relation of the referents to each other. Furthermore, it becomes clear that *b-* as a postpositional object pronoun never refers to an inanimate, non-salient entity; the referent must be ranking very high in animacy, agency and salience.

### 3.2.2.3 *The meaning of b- as a postpositional object prefix*

Let us review what we know so far about the use of postpositional *b-* with third person subjects. Although *y-* is the more common choice, as we have seen in Table 3.2, *b-* is permitted both in bivalent and transitive verbs. In a lot of cases, speakers will accept either *b-* or *y-*, sometimes indicating a preference for one of them. Sometimes, one of the possibilities will even be judged to be ungrammatical.

We will assume now that *y-* is the default case and that the choice of *y-* marking does not have to be motivated. So, what motivates a speaker to choose *b-* for a postpositional object rather than *y-*? In the examples above, we have seen several reasons: Animacy, salience, reference tracking. But all these cases had one thing in common: The referent of the postpositional object prefix was – for whatever reason – judged to be more prominent than at least one other referent in the same verb word. In a bivalent verb, such as in the verb form *benu'iju* ‘she came back to him’ that we discussed as example (3.34a), the object was considered to be more animate than the subject. In a case like *bek'uyitdet* ‘he pulled it (spear) away from it (bear)’, the postpositional object outranks the direct object, even though the postpositional object in its turn is outranked by the subject.

Although *b-* as postpositional object marker does not necessarily indicate that its referent is the most prominent one in the utterance – in ditransitive verbs, the subject may outrank the *b-* marked object – it by inference does so in bivalent verbs. If the object ranks higher than the only other argument, the subject, it is the most prominent referent.

Last of all, let us quickly turn to those cases where the postposition does not constitute a part of the verb word and instead occurs alone. The example looked at earlier is repeated here as (3.43):

(3.43) postposition without verb (Delkittie 1976:60f.)

Veł yagheli gheli.

<i>v-</i>	<i>eł</i>	yagheli	gheli
BO-	with	good	really
with him		it was good	really

‘He was real happy.’

(3.43) does not contain a verb form; the propositional content is carried solely by the combination of the postpositional phrase *P-eł* and the particle *yagheli* ‘good’. Therefore, the object of the postposition *eł* is the only participant in this utterance. We know now that postpositional objects may be encoded by either *y-* or *b-*, and that *b-* is chosen if the postpositional object referent outranks at least one participant. In (3.43), there is only one participant, so a case could be made for the choice of either *y-* or *b-*: *Y-* could be employed because its referent does not rank higher than any other referent within the same utterance. *B-* could be employed because its referent is the most prominent referent of the utterance, as it is with bivalent verbs.

Considering the way that this kind of postpositional objects is marked – and elicited data support the findings of table 3.4 above – it transpires that the second argument is more powerful than the first one. As no other referent is present, the postpositional object is by default considered to be the highest-ranking, therefore warranting *b-* marking.

### 3.2.3 Summary: Postpositional objects

Let us recapitulate our findings on postpositional object marking. We have seen that postpositional object marking is similar to direct object marking with respect to the pronominal inventory (with a few exceptions discussed in Chapter 2), and with the basic distribution of unmarked, *y-* marked and *b-* marked objects, respectively: *B-* marked objects are used if the subject is neither first nor second or unmarked third person, *y-* marked object prefixes are the default case if the subject is unmarked third person, and objects are unmarked if the subject is first or second person.

However, postpositional object marking differs from direct object marking in two respects: First of all, naked postpositions are disallowed. If the subject is first or second person (thus triggering unmarked postpositional objects), but no full object NP is found adjacent to the verb, the object must be marked by *b-*. Secondly, there is a choice of object prefixes if the subject is third person. In these cases, both

*y*- marking and *b*- marking are permitted. The choice of the appropriate object prefix is governed by relative animacy or salience – *b*- if the postpositional object ranks higher than at least one other participant of the verb form, *y*- if it does not. In some rare cases, different pronominal prefixes can be used to disambiguate reference.

### 3.3 Possessor marking

In this section, we will investigate third person possessor marking. The methods employed here are the same as in the preceding sections on third person object marking, as is for the most part the pronominal inventory.

Three possibilities will be analyzed here: unmarked, *y*- marked and *b*- marked possessors. Furthermore, we will briefly consider indefinite possession, which sometimes is used as a back-grounding strategy.

#### 3.3.1 *B- as possessor marker*

Before we start on the intricacies of Dena'ina possessor marking, I will present examples for possessor marking with an immediately adjacent NP (3.44a,b), possessor marking without a possessor NP if the subject is unmarked third person (3.45a,b), and possessor marking without a possessor NP if the subject is not unmarked third person (3.46a,b).

(3.44) immediately adjacent possessor NP (Pete 2003:164)

- (a) Tommy        betukda  
T.                *b*-        tukda  
T.                B.Poss- father  
‘Tommy’s father’

- (b) Tommy        tukda (Pete 2003:167)  
T.                Ø-        tukda  
T.                Ø.Poss- father  
‘Tommy’s father’

(3.45) Subject = unmarked third person (Pete 1996:5)

(a) Inik' tunaniggat.

<i>y-</i>	nik'	tunaniggat
Y.Poss-	nose	handle.LRO.into.nose
its nose	he	speared it in its nose

'He speared the bear right into the nose.'

(b) Benik' ch'aheynetenh t'ehjuq.

<i>b-</i>	nik'	ch'aheynetenh	t'ehjuq'
B.Poss-	nose	it stuck out	it happened
its nose	it was sticking out		

'It (the bone spearhead) was sticking out of its nose.'

(3.46) Subject  $\neq$  unmarked third person

(a) Vezaga qizdlan. (Al. Evan 1976:18)

<i>v-</i>	zaga	q-	izdlan
B.Poss-	exhaustion	AREAL.S-	become
his exhaustion		it became	

'He became exhausted.'

(b) Ts'elq'i bech'esh bagheshdghes. (Pete 1977:13)

ts'elq'i	<i>b-</i>	ch'esh	bagheshdghes
one	B.Poss-	knee	I bit on it
one of his knees	I bit on it		

'I bit one of his knees.'

The examples (3.44-3.46) suggest several things about the distribution of unmarked, *y-* marked and *b-* marked possessors. Taking these utterances as a basis for our assumptions, we would expect that unmarked possessors may occur if and only if there is an immediately adjacent possessor NP present. As we have already seen that object prefixes and full object NPs can co-occur in an utterance, we would suppose that this is possible for possessor prefixes and possessor NPs as well. With respect to the distribution of *y-* and *b-* as possessor markers, it is likely that both of them are permitted (cf. (3.45)). However, *b-* should be slightly more frequent, as possessors tend to be prototypically animate/human, and to exercise a certain measure of control over the possessed. *Y-* should not be allowed whenever the subject is not unmarked third person (cf. (3.46)).

Table 3.5 shows the actual distribution of possessor prefixes in the corpus. If the subject is third person, cases with and without full possessor NP will be treated separately. If the subject is not unmarked third person, this distinction will not be maintained, as no difference in the marking can be observed.

		unmarked S		marked S	total
		+ NP	-NP		
poss	∅	24	0	0	24
	Y	2	27	2	31
	B	18	101	28	147
total		44	128	30	202

Table 3.5: Distribution of possessor markers

It turns out that our assumptions were more correct than not: If there is a full possessor NP present, a possessor marker may be present or absent. If no adjacent possessor NP is present, ∅- marking is not permitted. If the subject is not unmarked third person, there is a clear preference for *b*- marking.

The main difference between the assumptions and the facts is that we have a clear default case for possessors. In contrast to the default cases in the domain of object pronominals (*y*- marking), the default case for possessors is *b*- marking. As a reason for this, I would like to suggest the hierarchy of semantic roles as proposed in Dowty (1991) and Primus (1999).

This will be discussed in the following subsection.

### 3.3.2 *Y*- as possessor marker

Contrary to object marking, the default case for possessor marking is *b*- marking. In a corpus of 202 possessed nouns<sup>20</sup>, 148 are marked by *b*-; this corresponds to approximately 75 percent of all cases. Even if we only consider constellations with a third person subject and a possessor prefix, the overwhelming majority of nouns is marked by *b*- and not by *y*-.

Let us assume that the same factors that govern the choice of object prefixes also govern the choice of possessor prefixes.<sup>21</sup> We have seen that direct objects are *y*-/∅- marked if the subject ranks higher than the object, and *b*- marked, if this is not the case. We have also seen that postpositional objects are *b*- marked if the object

<sup>20</sup> Two kinds of nouns were counted: Nouns that exhibited an overt possessor prefix, and nouns that were modified by an overt possessor noun phrases. Nouns that exhibited neither were considered to be unpossessed.

<sup>21</sup> We will also assume that *y*- marking and ∅- marking fulfill the same purposes, while *b*- marking has a different function.

referent outranks at least one other participant, and *y*-/ $\emptyset$ - marked if this is not the case. Thus, we can summarize the function of *b*- as an object prefix as follows: *B*- as an object prefix indicates that its referent is either of heightened relevance with respect to other participants, or of higher animacy than these others.

If we transfer this meaning of *b*- to possessor marking, it is not surprising that the majority of all possessor prefixes is *b*-. Objects in Dena'ina usually exhibit a fair share of patient proto-roles. This, on the other hand, does not hold true for possessors, whose only<sup>22</sup> proto-role is possession or rather, control, over the possessed entity. CONTROL is, as shown by Dowty (1991) and Primus (1999), one of the agentive roles. Thus, possessors are agentive in nature and always rank higher than at least one other referent within the same clause. Hence, they are marked by *b*- far more often than by *y*-. One question that will be addressed in this section is accordingly why some possessors do exhibit *y*- marking at all, if *b*- marking is available and always easy to motivate.

Another feature of possessors is animacy. A possessor is not necessarily animate or even human, but prototypically, it is. Table 3.6 shows how many of the possessors in the present corpus are human, animate and inanimate. Information about how many tokens of each of the possessor prefixes are found in each category is included.

	Human	Animate	Inanimate	Total
$\emptyset$ -	13	10	1	24
<i>y</i> -	12	16	3	31
<i>b</i> -	109	37	1	147
Total	134	63	5	202

Table 3.6: Animacy and possession

Table 3.6 shows clearly that about two thirds of possessors are human, while only about one third is non-human animate. Practically no inanimate possessors can be found. In both of the main categories of possessors – humans and animates – *b*-marked possessors form the clear majority. Only in the least documented category, that of inanimate possessors, there might be a tendency towards possessive *y*-marking. However, the amount of data is not sufficient to make any claims there.

<sup>22</sup> Of course, the referent of a possessor can have different semantic roles within the same utterance. However, these roles can only be encoded by anaphors to the possessor prefix, not by the possessor prefix itself.

To go back to our argument: In view of the facts that POSSESSOR is an agentive  $\Theta$ -role, and that possessors are prototypically animate, if not human, the choice of *b-* as the default possessor marker is highly motivated. It remains, however, to determine why sometimes *y-* marking is employed.

First of all, not all cases that were counted as *y-* here actually employ the *y-* morpheme. 8 of the total of 31 *y-* marked nouns exhibit plural possessive *q-*, as illustrated in (3.47).

(3.47) Nicolie (1976:3)

Nunudatl' hnu'u qugguya ghini yit eydu.

nunudatl'	hnu'u	<i>q-</i>	<i>gguya</i>	ghini	yit	eydu
they came back	when	Q.Poss-	little	that	there	it sat
they came back	when	their baby	that	it was sitting	there	

'When they returned their baby was sitting there.'

In the sections on object marking, we also discussed the meaning of *q-* object marker. It transpired that the object marker *q-* has the meaning components [+ human], or at least [+ animate] and [- singular]. Let us assume that the possessive marker *q-* shares these features. What then distinguishes possessive *q-* from possessive *b-*? As we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, *b-* marked possessors also are usually [+ human], or at least [+ animate]. Thus, if *q-* is chosen as a possessor prefix, the feature [+ human/+ animate] is maintained and the feature [- singular] is added.

If this train of thought were correct, it would be likely that there are no cases of possessive *qub-* in the corpus, which actually is the case.

Still, there remain 23 instances of *y-* possessives that have to be explained. Of these 23, 6 have a human referent, 14 an animate (non-human), and 3 an inanimate one. Thus, animacy (or the lack thereof) cannot be the explanation for this way of possessor marking.

However, all *y-* marked nouns have something in common: They are obligatorily possessed. Moreover, with the exception of one, they denote body parts. In languages that display a distinction between alienable and inalienable possession, body parts always are a subgroup of the inalienable possessed nouns.

Let us consider the difference between possessing a leg or an uncle and possessing a cane, a jacket or a house.<sup>23</sup> Both body parts and relatives are inherently possessed – it is the default case for a person to have arms, legs and a mother, while human beings do not necessarily have a jacket or a house. Also, holding on to an entity that is not inherently possessed involves a higher level of control than holding on to your body parts – most of us have at some point lost an article of clothing or some household item, but very few of us have lost a body part. Thus, the agentive proto-role CONTROL is weaker for body parts than it is for other possessions.

In the light of these findings, it is not surprising that *y*-marking is possible for body parts. However, it is necessary to point out that despite of the possibility of *y*-marking for body parts, the overwhelming majority of them are still marked by *b*-. So what exactly motivates the choice of *y*-marking in possessives? Let us look at an example where both *y*- and *b*-marking occur within a sequence of utterances.

(3.48) *y*- vs. *b*- possessive (Pete 1996:5)

(a) Nu'italyin.

nu- Ø<sub>Son</sub>- 'italyin  
 LEX- ØS- be.ready  
 he was ready (for it)

'He was on guard [with weapons].'

(b) Qaḥnigi ghini ilu ldeḥ hnuq'u ijagh dak'itgheḥkes.

qaḥnigi	ghini	<i>y</i> <sub>Bear</sub> -	<i>lu</i>	Ø <sub>Bear</sub> -	ldeḥ		hnuq'u
rock	this		Y.POSS-	hand	ØS-	lift.PL.O	when
this rock			he put his	front legs	up		when

<i>y</i> <sub>Bear</sub> -	<i>jagh</i>	dak'-	Ø <sub>Son</sub> -	itgheḥkes
Y.POSS-	chest	in.somewhere-	ØS-	hit
his chest		he is going to hit him	somewhere	

'When that bear put his front legs up on the rock, he was going to hit him on the chest someplace.'

<sup>23</sup> Willie (1991, 2000) categorizes body parts, relatives and some other nouns as inalienably possessed in Navajo. However, the categorization of Dena'ina seems to differ from that; judging from the present corpus, relatives are not eligible for *y*-marking.

(c) Inik' tunaniggat.

$y_{\text{Bear-}}$	<i>nik'</i>	tu-	$\emptyset_{\text{Son-}}$	naniggat
Y.POSS-	nose	in.nose-	$\emptyset\text{S-}$	handle.LRO
its nose		he speared	him in his nose	

'He speared the bear right into the nose.'

(d) Benik' ch'aheynetenh t'ejuq.

$b_{\text{Bear-}}$	<i>nik'</i>	ch'aheynetenh	t'ejuq
B.POSS-	nose	it sticks out	it happened
its nose		it was sticking out	

'It (the bone spearhead) was sticking out of its nose.'

(3.48c-d) is the same example as (3.45) above; here, we present the greater context of these utterances. The whole example is taken from the beginning of the story of Quch' Nushjun. Father and son go bear hunting. (3.48) describes how the son spears the bear by mistake in the wrong place – and explains how the bear eventually will be able to spear him in his turn.

A very interesting thing about (3.48) is that subject reference changes from utterance to utterance, as shown by the indices: In (3.48a) and (3.48c), the son is the subject; in (3.48b), the bear is the subject, and in (3.48d), the spear. This changing subject reference has to be marked somehow.

Consider (3.48b). As the possessor of the hands and the subject of the verb *ldet* are co-referential, we would expect the reflexive possessive *d-*. However, in that case there would be no indicator that *ldet* has a different subject than *nu'italyin*. Possessive *y-*, on the other hand, by virtue of encoding disjoint reference, can indicate that the possessor of the hands is not identical with the subject of the preceding clause, thus yielding the meaning that the bear put up its forelegs. (Note that the bear also ranks lower on the animacy hierarchy than the son, thus making the use of *y-* even more likely).

In the following two clauses, the son is the subject and the bear is the possessor of the body parts in question. The possessive *y-* marking is maintained throughout this stretch, as its referent is both disjoint from and lower-ranking than the subject. However, when the subject reference changes to the spear in (3.48d), which ranks lower than the bear, the latter is referred to by possessive *b-*.

Again we see that the distribution of *y-* and *b-* markers depends on the relative agency of the referents. In one respect, however, possessor markers differ from

object markers. The default case for object marking is *y-*, and ‘upgrading’ to *b-* marking is permitted only under special circumstances. The default case for possessor marking, on the other hand, is *b-*, and here the ‘downgrading’ has to be motivated by special circumstances, such as possessor raising in combination with low rank on the animacy hierarchy.

### 3.4 Summary of object and possessor marking

In this chapter, we looked at the distribution of the object and possessor marking allomorphs  $\emptyset$ -, *y-* and *b-*, as well as their plural counterparts *q-* and *qub-*. It turned out that the distribution of these allomorphs is clearly governed by both syntactic and semantic principles. Table 3.7 summarizes the results:

	S = 3		S ≠ 3	
			S = 1, 2	S = Areal etc.
DO	Y		$\emptyset$	B
OO	Y	B	B	B
Poss	Y	B	B	B

Table 3.7: Distribution of object and possessor affixes

Table 3.7 presents the preferred allomorph under certain syntactic conditions for direct objects, postpositional objects and possessor prefixes.<sup>24</sup> In most cases, only one of the allomorphs is permitted. If there is more than one possible choice, the cell of the less usual case is grey shaded. All default cases therefore are in cells with white backgrounds.

The results can be summarized as follows. *B-* is the default prefix for all possessors. If the subject of the clause is unmarked third person and not co-referential with the possessor, and if the possessor is lower in rank than the subject, the possessor may be marked by *y-*.

*B-* is also the default pronominal prefix for postpositional objects if the subject is not unmarked third person. If the subject is unmarked third person, the relative position on the animacy hierarchy of the postpositional object determines whether it is marked by *b-* (if it ranks higher than at least one other participant) or by *y-* (if it ranks lower than all other participants).

<sup>24</sup> Note that  $\emptyset$ - marking is always allowed if a co-referential NP is immediately adjacent to the verb, the postposition or the noun. As this is a regular exception to the rules stated in 3.7 and the following paragraphs, this will not be considered separately and is not indicated in the table.

The greatest diversity can be observed with direct objects. If the subject is third person, the direct object is marked by *y-*. If the subject is not third person, there are two possibilities: A first and second person subject triggers by default an unmarked third person object and in very rare cases a *b-* marked object, while Areal, *k'*-indefinite or incorporated subjects trigger a *b-* marked object.

Let us reconsider these rules with respect to ranking. Possessors are always higher in rank than the possessed entity, thus they are marked by *b-*. We have seen that sometimes, if the level of control involved in the possession is low and if the possessor ranks low compared to the main participant of a clause, the possessor may be marked by *y-*.

Postpositional objects are marked by *b-* if the subject is not unmarked third person. We have seen that different factors can account for this marking pattern: If the subject is an Areal, a *k'*-indefinite or an incorporate, it is outranked by the postpositional (definite, oftentimes animate) object, thus justifying *b-*. If the subject is first or second person, the *b-* marking is employed in avoidance of naked postpositions. Bear in mind that *y-* marking is only permitted with unmarked third person subjects. With these subjects, postpositional *y-* marking is actually the default case. Only if the referent of the postpositional object is considered to be more animate or salient than the referent of the subject, is *b-* marking possible.

Now to direct objects. If the subject is an Areal, a *k'*-indefinite or an incorporate, it is again always outranked by the direct object. Consequently, the direct object marker for this case is *b-*. If the subject is first or second person, the object is usually not marked at all. The only exception to this is if the object is of heightened syntactic relevance – as the head of a relative clause. In this case, *b-* marking is again permitted. If both subject and object are third person, and if the object ranks lower than the subject, it is marked by *y-*.

In general, *b-* therefore indicates that its referent is high in animacy and salience, while  $\emptyset$ - and *y-* indicate that their referents are low in these respects. However, this is not the whole story about *y-* marking. In this whole chapter, one possibility has been ignored: What if both subject and object are third person, and the object ranks higher than the subject? We will see in the following chapter that Dena'ina has a rather unusual strategy of encoding this relation between agents.

## 4 Third person subject marking

When discussing third person object marking in the preceding chapter, we noticed that there is not only an object prefix *y-*, but that *y-* can also function as a subject prefix. In the following section, we will investigate the use of *y-* subjects.

### 4.1 Y- as subject prefix

Let us recall the uses for *y-* and *b-* objects we were just discussing. In a strongly abbreviated and simplified version, they were something like (4.1)<sup>1</sup>:

$$(4.1) \quad \begin{array}{l} 1,2 \text{ S} > 3 \text{ O} \Rightarrow \emptyset\text{- O} \\ 1,2 \text{ S} < 3 \text{ O} \Rightarrow b\text{- O} \\ 3 \text{ S} > 3 \text{ O} \Rightarrow y\text{- O} \end{array}$$

So, with regard to direct object prefixes, one logical possibility cannot be pronominally expressed: A low-ranking third person subject acting on a high-ranking third person (direct) object. Some languages, like Navajo and most other Apachean languages (Hale 1973, Sandoval & Jelinek 1989, Willie 1991, Jung 1999) use the pronominal object *b-* in combination with an unmarked subject to express this constellation. Dena'ina, however, uses a different approach.

The system in the Apachean languages is fundamentally different. First of all, cognates of neither *y-* nor *b-* occur if the subject is first or second person (cf. Jung 1999:129). Consequently, there is no means to express that the third person object is higher in rank than the first or second person subject (interestingly, none of the publications dealing with object marking in Apachean even considers this constellation).<sup>2</sup> But, unlike Dena'ina, *b-* object is used to encode that the third person object is higher in rank than the *third person* subject. Thus, Apachean has a separate way of object marking for each of the constellations in (4.2):

$$(4.2) \quad \begin{array}{l} 1,2 \text{ S} > 3 \text{ O} \Rightarrow \emptyset\text{- O} \\ 3 \text{ S} > 3 \text{ O} \Rightarrow y\text{- O} \\ 3 \text{ S} < 3 \text{ O} \Rightarrow b\text{- O} \end{array}$$

All these constellations are illustrated by the examples in (4.3):

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<sup>1</sup> Here, only the direct object marking is considered. Remember that the main difference of oblique object marking was the fact that the system permitted  $3\text{S} < 3\text{OO}$  for  $\emptyset$ -marked subjects, with a *b-* marking of the object.

<sup>2</sup> This is pragmatically a rare constellation. We will see, however, that Dena'ina has at least one construction where exactly this constellation occurs. The pattern there, predictably, is that the object is marked by *b-*.

(4.3) participant marking in Navajo

- (a) 1,2 S > 3 O ⇒ Ø- O; Willie (1991:33)

yíłtsá

Ø- yíłtsá<sup>3</sup>

3O- I saw

‘I saw him/her/it’

- (b) Ø 3 S > 3 O ⇒ Y- O; Thompson (1989:134)

łééchaa’i łeets’aa’ yíłnaad

łééchaa’i      łeets’aa’      yí-      łnaad  
dog              plate              Yi-      licked

‘the dog licked the plate’

- (c) Ø 3 S < 3 O ⇒ B- O; Thompson (1989:134)

ashkii tó biisxi

’ashkii              to2      bi-      isxi

boy                  water      Bi-      killed

‘the boy drowned (lit. the water killed the boy)’

In (4.3a), the relative ranking of subject and object does not matter at all, and the third person object is always unmarked. (4.3b) is straightforward: an animate entity, the dog, is acting upon an inanimate entity. Thus, the default object marking *yí-* V applies. In (4.3c), last of all, the normal hierarchical relation between subject and object is reversed, and an inanimate entity is acting on an animate one. That is encoded by *bi-* marking.

But, as we saw in the preceding chapter, this way of object marking is not permitted in Dena’ina. An unmarked third person subject can never take a *b-* direct object, no matter which one of them ranks higher than the other. Instead, Dena’ina marks the subject for being low in rank. Cf. (4.4):

- (4.4) Marking of low-ranked subject (Pete 1996:3)

chibeyił’ish

chi-      b-      y-      ił’ish

death      BO-      YS-      kill PL.O

‘it (spear) killed them (bears)’

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<sup>3</sup> The *yí-* prefix in this example may not be confused with the Navajo cognate of *y-* objects; it is instead cognate to the Dena’ina *gb-* perfective.

The striking thing about this example is that it contains both a *b-* and a *y-* pronominal prefix. Contrary to most other Athabascan languages, *y-* and *b-* are not in complementary distribution in Dena'ina, but they may co-occur. This construction, sometimes called *y-b-* construction, is also found in Koyukon (Thompson 1989a, 1996) and Ahtna (Rice 2000b, Tuttle, p.c.), both of them neighboring languages to Dena'ina.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.1.1 *Position and basic meaning*

Intuitively, it is clear that *b-* and *y-* in (4.4) cannot both be object prefixes. The Dena'ina verb *'ik* 'kill plural object' takes one object prefix at the most<sup>5</sup>. So, one of these prefixes must be something else. If we look at the distribution of *b-* as a direct object prefix, it turns out that *b-* is used only in combination with an overt subject within the verb form. *B-* objects are not permitted with unmarked subjects, and they occur more frequently if the subject is marked in the outer subject position than if it is marked in the inner subject position. As *y-* subject occurs to the right of *b-* object, this hypothesis is further supported by positional facts.

External subjects are marked immediately to the right of direct objects. In no instance of *y-* subject with a direct *b-* object, morphological material intervenes between those two markers. If the *b-* is a postpositional object, it is possible for morphological material to intervene between *b-* and *y-*. That, however, does not have impact on the position of the *y-* subject marker, which is still found in the outer subject position.

It is less clear which morphemes occur to the right of *b-* subject. According to the template proposed in Tenenbaum (1978:34), the thematic prefix *q-* of position 11 should be to the right of outer subjects. However, this prefix occurs in only one theme, *q-nax* 'talk', and none of the tokens of this theme display a *y-* subject. The same can be said for the following morpheme, conative *i-* and semi-transitive *i-*; I have not found an example of either of these morphemes co-occurring with a *y-* subject. There might be some examples with a *y-* subject followed by an inceptive marker (which is the morpheme following the conative and semi-transitive), but further analysis is needed. For the time being, the fact that no morphemes may

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that the results we find for Dena'ina might be true for either of the other two languages. In fact, Thompson's (1989a, 1996) examples suggest that the Koyukon system might work fundamentally differently, while there is not sufficient data to make any claims about Ahtna at this point.

<sup>5</sup> "At the most" because the object may be unmarked under the circumstances described in the preceding chapter.

occur between *y*- subject and *b*- direct object has to sufficiently illustrate that the *y*-morpheme is found in the outer subject position.

There is also semantic motivation to group *y*- subjects with the outer subjects. If we consider the meaning of the other prefixes found in that position – *q*- ‘Areal’, *k*’- ‘plain indefinite’, *ch*’- ‘human indefinite, (first person plural)<sup>6</sup>, *q*- ‘human plural’, we see that all these prefixes not only serve in subject function, but also that they all have a classifying meaning component, classifying their referents as to definiteness, agency, and number. The *y*- subject prefix neatly fits into this category, as it – this will be shown in the following paragraphs – classifies its referents as [+definite, -human].

Considering these factors (distribution, position, semantics), we tentatively assume that *y*- is an outer subject prefix with definite, non-human reference that triggers a *b*- object, thus being similar to *ch*’- ‘human indefinite’ and *k*’- ‘plain indefinite’.

Now the participant marking in (4.4) is quite transparent. The low-ranking subject is marked by *y*-, while the higher-ranking object is marked by *b*-. Judging from (4.4), and following Tenenbaum (1978:68), we might suggest the meaning ‘non-human or inanimate subject’ for the *y*- subject. In the following sections, this hypothesis will be considered.

#### 4.1.2 Syntax of *y*- as a subject marker

Before we start looking at more examples of *y*- subjects, let me mention several syntactic facts about this affix. First of all, its occurrence is not at all influenced by co-referential NPs. The encoding we have seen in (4.4) is not changed if we adjoin co-referential NPs to either the object or the subject, or even both referents:

(4.5a) full object NP

Ggagga chibeyiʔish.

<i>ggagga</i>	chi-	<i>b</i> -	<i>y</i> -	iʔish
brown.bear	kill-	BO-	YS-	kill.PL.O
bear	it killed them			

‘It killed bears.’<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> We found in chapter 2 that ‘first person plural’ was a secondary reading for the subject prefix *ch*’-. For this reason, it will be ignored here.

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is ambiguous; it can also be read as ‘The bear(s) killed them (people)’.

(4.5b) full subject NP

Tuqesi chibeyiʔish.

tuqesi	chi-	<i>b-</i>	<i>y-</i>	iʔish
spear	kill-	BO-	YS-	kill.PL.O
spear	it killed them			

‘A spear killed them.’

(4.5c) both full object and subject NP

Tuqesi ggagga chibeyiʔish.<sup>8</sup>

tuqesi	ggagga		chi-	<i>b-</i>	<i>y-</i>	iʔish
spear	brown.bear	kill-	BO-	YS-		kill.PL.O
spear	bear	it killed them				

‘A spear killed bears.’

Because of the participant marking – low-ranking subject acting on high-ranking object – it is clear in both (4.5a) and (4.5b) who is doing what to whom. Spears, being inanimate, rank considerably lower in animacy than bears.<sup>9</sup>

Second, *y-* subject marking never occurs in verb forms that only have a subject argument. It may only be used if there is at least one other argument present in the argument structure, cf. the examples in (4.6). However, it does not matter whether the other argument is direct, as in (4.4), or postpositional, as in (4.6c). Both direct and oblique arguments are encoded by *b-* if the subject is encoded by *y-*.

(4.6a) Ø- subject, no postpositional phrase

Gheyuʔ.

Ø-	gh-	yuʔ
ØS-	PROG-	walk
‘S/he/it was walking along.’		

(4.6b) *y-* subject, no postpositional phrase

\*Yuyuʔ.

<i>y-</i>	gh-	yuʔ
YS-	PROG-	walk
Intended: ‘It was walking.’		

<sup>8</sup> I recently noticed that this sentence actually means ‘A fish spear killed the bear.’ I didn’t understand at the time what the speaker thought so funny about the utterance.

<sup>9</sup> Also, verbal semantics come into play in these particular examples, as bears qualify for being killed, while spears do not. The reading ‘it (bear) killed the spears’ is not possible.

(4.6c) *y*- subject, postpositional phrase

Qubeł yuyuł.

*qub-* eł *y-* gh- yuł  
QBO- with YS- PROG- walk  
'It (dog) was walking with them.'

Third, it also does not play a role whether the other argument is obligatory (4.6a), thus being the object of an incorporated postposition that is part of the lexicon entry of the verb, or whether it is facultative, being introduced by a postposition that is not part of the lexicon entry. An example for the latter case is once again (4.6c). The postposition *eł* is no part of the verb theme for walking. In (4.7), on the other hand, the same postposition is part of the theme, as fighting is impossible if there is nobody to fight with:

(4.7) Postposition as part of the verb theme (An. Evan 1976a:14)

Veł tseghaytghaltlet.

*v-* eł tsegha- *y-* tghaltlet  
BO- with fight- YS- start.fighting  
with him it started to fight  
'It started fighting with him'

To recapitulate: *y*- subjects may only occur in transitive or ditransitive or bivalent (verbs with only a postpositional and no direct object) verbs, irrespective of the obligatoriness of the object argument. The occurrence of co-referential NPs does not influence the behavior of *y*- subjects whatsoever.

## 4.2 Use of *y*- subject

Equipped with these facts, let us take a closer look at the use of *y*- subjects. From now on, there will be no distinction as to whether the object of the verb form in question is direct or postpositional, obligatory or optional.

In order to illustrate the contrast between *y*- subjects and unmarked subjects, the latter ones will be indicated by  $\emptyset$ - (in the position of the outer subjects) in the following discussion, although they are not considered to be  $\emptyset$ -marked but unmarked. This is purely for clarification and does not have theoretical implications.

#### 4.2.1 Use of *y*- subject: Agency

When the *y*- subject was first introduced, it was suggested that it encodes a non-human or even inanimate referent. In her grammar of Dena'ina, Tenenbaum (1978:68f.) comes to the same conclusion. Cf. (4.8) and (4.9):

##### (4.8) *y*- subject vs. Ø- subject (Tenenbaum 1978:69)

###### (a) Vetl'i yeshjay.

*v*-      tl'i      *y*-      eshjay  
BO-    up.to-    YS-    run  
up to him      it ran

'It (wolf) caught up to him running.'

###### (b) Shtl'i shjay.

*sh*-                      tl'i      Ø-      shjay  
1SG.O-                  up.to    Ø-      run  
up to me                                  s/he ran

'S/he (human) caught up to me running.'

##### (4.9) *y*- subject vs. Ø- subject

###### (a) Beyitl'as. (Pete 1996:3)

*b*-      *y*-      itl'as  
BO-    YS-    hit.PF  
it hit it

'It (bone) hit it (bear).'

###### (b) Yitl'as. (elicited)

*y*-      itl'as  
YO-    hit.O  
she hit him

'She hit him/it hit it.'

The common ground of both (4.8) and (4.9) is clearly that the referents in both sentences differ with respect to their agency. On any given animacy hierarchy, a man will rank higher than a wolf, and a bear will rank higher than a bone. However, there is a problem with the concept of animacy in this context.

A look at various animacy hierarchies reveals that there usually are distinctions within the realm of animals regarding their animacy: A big animal is higher on the hierarchy than a small animal, and a predator higher than its prey.

However, as we're discussing an animacy hierarchy, this leads to the slightly curious conclusion that a horse is more animate than a sheep, and a cat more animate than a mouse. Not to mention the question of whether a cat or a horse is more animate – is size more important, or the predator-prey distinction? And what with spirits – are they animate, and if yes, are they more animate than animals? Quite possibly, this is the reason why animacy hierarchies oftentimes differ from each other even within one linguistic or cultural group: Different speakers may have different view points on this question.

The substitution of the term agency for animacy, as Leer (1993) suggested, does not fully resolve these problems, but it leaves more room for debate on the relative ranking of two referents under particular circumstances. Even if agency is the criterion that determines whether a referent is encoded as *y*- subject or unmarked subject, or whether an object is marked by  $\emptyset$ -, *y*-, or *b*-, there is still some room for the speaker's evaluation of the whole situation. In a lot of cases, therefore, the term agency is more helpful than animacy. Consider the following examples, taken from the story "Raven and Caribou":

(4.10) agency and *y*- marking (An. Evan 1976a:14)

(a) Vejex nghiʔan.

vejex	$\emptyset_{Car}$ -	$\emptyset_{Rav}$ -	nghiʔan
caribou	$\emptyset$ -	$\emptyset S$ -	see
caribou	he saw		

'He [Raven] saw the Caribou.'

(...)

(b) Vejex ghini yech' tazyu.

vejex	ghini	<i>y</i> <sub>Car</sub> -	ch'	$\emptyset_{Rav}$ -	tazyu
caribou	that	YO-	to	$\emptyset S$ -	start.walking
that Caribou	towards it		he started walking		

'He started walking towards the Caribou.'

(c) Vejex ghini veyghiʔan, hnuyu ghini veʔ tseghaytghaltlet.

vejex	ghini	<i>v</i> <sub>Rav</sub> -	<i>y</i> <sub>Car</sub> -	ghiʔan	hnuyu	vejex	ghini
caribou	this	BO-	YS-	see.PF	when	caribou	this
that Caribou	it saw him			when that Caribou			

$\nu_{\text{Rav-}}$	eł	tsegha-	$y_{\text{Car-}}$	tghaltlet
BO-	with	fight-	YS-	fight
	with him			it started to fight

‘When the Caribou saw him, he charged him.’

In (4.10), two animate non-human referents appear. But although neither Raven nor Caribou would be considered human, it is quite clear from extra-linguistic context that Caribou is less agentive than Raven.

Raven is special. In all Alaskan Athabascan cultures, Raven occupies a particularly prominent place as trickster. He features in countless stories, sometimes in the role of trickster, sometimes just as a normal person, with very human shortcomings and desires. His abilities combine both human and birdlike ones; he can fly, but he can also build boats, go fishing or, as in the present story, use his hands to first annoy and, at a later point in the narrative, help the Caribou. So, Raven is much closer to human beings than Caribou. The Caribou does not have special abilities, it can see and bite Raven, and it can walk and run around. Thus, Raven is much more agentive – not only in a conceptual way, but also regarding the number of activities he is involved with in the present narrative: he flies, sees the Caribou, picks berries, walks towards the Caribou, talks to it (note that the Caribou never answers!), and so on. Raven throughout the story is taking an active role in the proceedings, while things just happen to the Caribou: Raven is agentive, Caribou is not.

Thus, the encoding exactly reflects the agency of both referents: While the agency of Raven is ordinary, the agency of Caribou is extraordinarily low, which results in the assignment of  $y$ - subjects to the Caribou. Unmarked subjects are used to encode the more agentive of the two. If he, as in (4.10c), occurs in object position, it is not surprising that he is marked by  $b$ - prefixes, neither syntactically (remember that  $y$ - subjects always trigger  $b$ - prefixes), but also because  $b$ - prefixes serve to reflect the fact that the objects are more prominent than their subjects.

For the rest of this story, the encoding of the two main referents is quite straightforward. In the utterances following (4.10), Caribou is the sole referent. As it only occurs as subject, Caribou is consistently encoded by unmarked subjects. Cf. (4.11):

(4.11) Caribou as only referent (An. Evan 1976a:14)

Htsast'a veghidesha qilan dghit'a lu.

htsast'a	<i>v-</i>	eghidesha	qilan	Ø-	dghit'a lu.
long.ago	B.POSS-	fangs	AREAL.S.be	ØS-	be.PF. it.is.said
long ago	his fangs		there were	he was thus,	it is said

'Long ago, he had fangs (lit.: long ago, his fangs existed, he was thus, it is said).'

Note that in accordance with the findings in Chapter 3, the possessor prefix *b-* is used, as there is no other, higher-ranking referent within the same sentence.

When Raven is re-introduced into the narrative, he once again is referred to by unmarked subjects. Caribou does not appear as a subject in that stretch of text; only *y-* object and possessor prefixes refer to it. When it does again occur as subject, it is unmarked. Raven, in the role of postpositional object, is again encoded by a *b-* object prefix. Observe (4.12):

(4.12) Non-obligatoriness of *y-* subjects (An. Evan 1976a:16)

Vejex ghini vekuch' hch'aniyu lu Chulyin gun ye'uh gheli niqadaghiset gheli vech' danich'ey yechan yighelgguk.

vejex	ghini	<i>v<sub>Rav</sub>-</i>	kuch'	hch'a-	Ø <sub>Car</sub> -	niyu	lu	
Caribou	this	BO-	away	from-	ØS-	go.PF-	it.is.said	
this Caribou		away from	him	he went			it is said	
Chulyin	gun		ye'uh	gheli	niqa	daghiset	gheli	
Raven	this		out	really	around	be.far	really	
this Raven			out	really	around	it was very	far	
<i>v<sub>Rav</sub>-</i>	ch'		danich'ey	<i>y<sub>Car</sub>-</i>	chan	yighe-	Ø <sub>Rav</sub> -	lgguk
BO-	towards		be.windy	Y.POSS-	scent	to.it	ØS-	go.PF
towards him			it was windy	its scent	he went in	it		

'The Caribou went away from him, it is said. Raven went around really far into his scent.'

The most important thing about (4.12) is that it shows that *y-* subjects are by no means obligatory, even in bivalent verbs. As we saw in Chapter 3, postpositional objects can be marked by *b-* in order to indicate that they are of higher rank than their subjects, irrespective of the shape of the subject. Thus, the prefixes in (4.12) sufficiently express the agency difference between Raven and Caribou, on the one hand, and between Raven and the wind, on the other hand, without marking either

of the subjects as low-ranking by using *y*- subject prefix. Note in contrast to that (4.13):

(4.13) change in subject encoding (An. Evan 1976a:16)

Vejex ghini nik'u'itqey ch'q'u hch'a'itjay – vyičhun.

vejex	ghini	nik'u-	Ø-	'itqey	ch'q'u
caribou	this	up-	ØS-	jump	and
this Caribou		it jumped up			and
hch'a-	Ø-	'itjay	<i>v</i> -	<i>y</i> -	ičhun
from	ØS-	run	BO-	YS-	smell
it ran away from there		it smelled him			

‘Then the Caribou rose suddenly and ran away – it smelled him.’

In the first two verb forms, Caribou is the only referent. Thus, it is encoded by unmarked subject prefixes. As soon as Caribou is the referent of a transitive verb, *O+ł+chun* ‘smell object’, the *y*- *b*- pattern applies. Here, it is important to note that *O+ł+chun* is the first verb marked by *y*- subject that is not agentive, but has an experiencer subject. In spite of this, agency is the main criterion for the choice of prefixes. Although with this verb, it is not important which one of the referents is more agentive (or animate, for that matter), the transitivity of the verb is sufficient to trigger the *y*- subject and *b*- object marker.

In the remainder of the story, we only see intransitive verb forms, or transitive verb forms with indefinite objects, so there is no choice of subject marking. (4.14) demonstrates that *y*- subjects are only permitted with *b*- objects that are by definition definite and referential. An indefinite, non-referential prefix as the one in (4.14) is not compatible with *y*- subjects:

(4.14) indefinite object triggers Ø- subject (An. Evan 1976a:16)

Iqech' q'uyehdi vejex ghini k'ičhix ha' dyuq.

iqech'	q'uyehdi	vejex	ghini	k'-	Ø-	ičhix	ha'	dyuq
thus	then	caribou	this	INDEF.O-	ØS-	smell	thus.it.became	
and this is how		the Caribou	it smells something				it became thus	

‘Thus the Caribou became able to smell.’

Actually, this is not very surprising. *Y*- subjects occur whenever the subject is lower in agency and animacy than the object. If the object is non-referential and/or indefinite, it can by definition not be higher than the referential and definite

subject<sup>10</sup>. The fact that indefinite *k'* cannot co-occur with *y*- subjects provides negative evidence for our hypothesis. If the meaning of *y*- subjects were not something like ‘non-human referent’, then the combination of *k'* and *y*- would not pose a problem.

We saw that there are three ways of encoding the arguments of an intransitive verb with an optional postpositional object: *y*- object and unmarked subject, *b*- object and unmarked subject, and *b*- object and *y*- subject. The latter two indicate that the object is higher in status than the subject. In the Raven and Caribou story we just looked at (examples (10-14)), *b*- object with *y*- subject was only used if the same constellation had existed in a preceding transitive construction. This is not the case in the following example, though.

The use of *y*- subject prefixes is not restricted to cases where the low-ranking referent is subject first of a transitive verb and only then, in following verb forms, subject of a verb that takes a postpositional object. Instead, the difference in agency between two referents can be so great that it does not matter whether the verb form where the low-ranking referent is subject is transitive or not. (4.15) is taken from another Raven story. Raven is interacting with a Seal. Observe the argument marking in this short stretch of text:

(4.15) *y*- subject in bivalent verb (An. Evan 1976b:48)

(a) Q'uyehdi neggech' yeł hch'aníyu.

q'uyehdi	neggech'	<i>y</i> -	eł	hch'a-	Ø-	niyu.
then	toward.shore	YO-	with	away-	ØS-	go
and then	upwards	with him		he started to go		

‘And then he started up with him.’

(b) Husaghił'ey gini jit gheli vetl'uyeh yuyul łu.

husaghił'ey	gini	jit	gheli
seal	this	barely	really
the Seal		barely really	

<i>v</i> -	tl'uyeh	<i>y</i> -	yuyul	łu
BO-	behind	YS-	walk.PROG.	it.is.said
behind him		he was walking		it is said

‘The Seal could barely keep up with him.’

<sup>10</sup> This is also why *k'* subjects always take *b*- objects and never unmarked ones. Cf. chapter 3.

- (c) Yet gheyuł yet gheyuł ch'q'u.  
 y- eł Ø- gheyuł  
 YO- with ØS- walk.PROG  
 with him he was walking  
 y- eł Ø- gheyuł ch'q'u  
 YO- with ØS- walk.PROG and  
 with him he was walking and  
 Raven kept walking and walking with him.

What we said about Raven in the last story also holds true for this one. In contrast to the Raven and Caribou Story, where both Raven and Caribou appeared in approximately half of the sentences each, the Seal only features in one section of this (very long) Raven story. Thus, it is quite obvious that Raven is the main character and the seal but a minor one. This is clearly reflected by the encoding in (4.15). In both (4.15a) and (4.15c), Raven is the subject and, as expected, unmarked. The objects – and note that these are postpositional objects, where *b-* marking is theoretically possible – are all marked by *y-*, thus indicating the low status of the Seal.

In (4.15b), this is reinforced by the Seal's becoming the subject. *Yut* 'walk' is an intransitive verb, a second argument is introduced by the (free) postposition *tl'uyeh* 'behind, following P'. If the postposition were marked by *b-*, and the subject by Ø-, this would sufficiently indicate that the subject is of lower status than the object. Therefore, (4.16) might constitute a substitute for (4.15b):

- (4.16) Ø-subject instead of *y-* subject (elicited)

Husaghił'ey gini jit gheli vetl'uyeh gheyuł łu.  
 husaghił'ey gini jit gheli  
 seal this barely really  
 the Seal barely really  
 v- tl'uyeh Ø- gheyuł łu  
 BO- behind ØS- walk.PROG. it.is.said  
 behind him he was walking it is said

The seal could barely keep up with him.

According to speakers, the sentence in (4.16) does “mean” the same as (4.15b), but it still is not the same sentence. By using *b-* object together with an unmarked subject, it is indicated that the object is high in status, higher than at least one other argument in the sentence. By using *b-* object with *y-* subject, the same thing holds true for the

object. The subject, on the other hand, has been actively demoted by the speaker. (15b) drives home the point of Seal's irrelevance, (4.16) does not.

In the preceding sections, we saw that two referents can by means of *y*-subjects be encoded according to their relative agentive rank. In this particular instance, both referents recur throughout the narrative. The encoding is maintained consistently, as the referents may change in salience, but they do not change with respect to their (inherent) agency and animacy.

In other cases, actual agency and animacy play more of a role than the reference-tracking functions. A good example for this is the Story of Quch' Nushjun, The Man who Back-Tracked Himself. In the first part of the story, it is described how Quch' Nushjun trains his son for bear-hunting, and how he makes his weapons. This stretch contains several main referents: Quch' Nushjun himself, the spear (or the bone spearhead), and the bear. Although we will concentrate on the verb forms containing *y*- subjects, the whole stretch of text dealing with the making of the spear is provided in the following example, in order to render the described proceedings more comprehensible. Prefixes are co-indexed: QN for Quch' Nushjun, BB for the brown bear, SP for the spear, SH for the spearhead.

(4.17) agency and *y*- marking (Pete 1996:2f.)

(a) Ggagga ghini ts'en niłq'ach' beq'un hnalqeyi ka'a t'ghit'a.

ggagga	ghini	ts'en	niłq'ach'	<i>b</i> <sub>qn</sub> -	q'un
brown.bear	these	bone	double-ended	B.POSS-	spearhead
brown bears	these	bone	double-ended	his	spearhead
hnalqeyi	t'ghit'a				
embedded	it was				
embedded	it was				

'He had a big double-ended spear with sharpened bone heads for those brown bears.'

(b) Q'aditin ghini bich'aqilyuh dyisen.

q'aditin	ghini	<i>b</i> <sub>sp</sub> -	ch'a-	q-	Ø <sub>qn</sub> -	ilyuh	dyisen
spear	that	BO-	out-	AREAL.O-	ØS-	drill	make
spear	that	he	he	gauged	a notch	out of	it

'He drilled a hole right into that spear.'

(c) Ch'u yiyah ch'u beq'atl'uyi~~l~~ges.

ch'u    *ɟ*<sub>sh</sub>-    iyah                    ch'u  
 and    YO-    spit.on                    and  
 and    he spit on it                    and

*b*<sub>sp</sub>-    q'a-                    tl'u-    *ɟ*<sub>sh</sub>-    Ø<sub>qn</sub>-    ɬges  
 BO-    into.hole-            back-    YO-    ØS-    move.O.violently  
 he jammed it into the notch

'And he spit on it (the spear-head) and jammed it into the notch (of the spear shaft).'

(d) Ggagga yiggat q'u yeɬ nutdenesh.

ggagga            *ɟ*<sub>bb</sub>-    Ø<sub>qn</sub>-    iggat    q'u    *ɟ*<sub>sp</sub>-    eɬ    nutdenesh.  
 brown.bear    YO-    ØS-    stab    now    YO-    with    he pulled back  
 brown bear    he stabbed                    and    with it                    he pulled back

'He would stab the brown bear and he pulled it back.'

(e) Ts'en ghini ghu uqayehnidelyash dyisen.

ts'en    ghini    ghu    uqa                    *ɟ*<sub>sh</sub>-    hnidelyash    dyisen  
 bone    this    there    for.purpose-    YO-    fix                    make  
 this bone    there    for that                    he fixed it                    he made it thus

'He fixed that bone so [it would detach].'

(f) Beyi~~l~~'as hnuq'u, ts'en ghini ch'a'iltuk', bek'uyi~~l~~deɬ.

*b*<sub>bb</sub>-    *ɟ*<sub>sp</sub>-    i~~l~~'ets'                    hnuq'u            ts'en    ghini  
 BO-    YS-    hit                    when                    bone    this  
 it hit it                    when                    this bone

ch'a-    Ø-    'iltuk'    *b*<sub>bb</sub>-    k'u-    *ɟ*<sub>sp</sub>-    Ø<sub>qn</sub>-    i~~l~~deɬ  
 out-    ØS-    run    BO-    from-    YO-    ØS-    handle.PL.O  
 it shot out                    he pulled them (parts of spear) away from it (bear)

'When it hit the bear that bone shot out and he pulled it away.'

(g) Q'u daghi~~l~~kugh chibeyi~~l~~'ish.

q'u    daghi~~l~~kugh    chi-    *b*<sub>bb</sub>-    *ɟ*<sub>sp</sub>-    i~~l~~'ish  
 now    it is big            death-    BO-    YS-    kill.PL.O  
 right away                    it killed would kill them

'It would kill it right away.'

In the first three utterances of (4.17), Quch' Nushjun is the subject of all verb forms. In accordance with our expectations, all subjects are unmarked, possessor prefixes referring to him (as in *beq'un*) are *b*- marked. Direct objects, referring to the spear

and to the spearhead (in (4.17c)) are marked by *y-*, and postpositional objects referring to the same entities are *b-* marked (note that within all verb forms containing a postpositional object, there also is a lower-ranking direct object present). This is exactly the behavior we observed in Chapter 3. In the following sentence, both reference and marking change slightly.

In (4.17d), the brown bear is the direct object of the first verb form, the spear is the postpositional object of the second one. As a direct object, the bear is marked by *y-*. However, the postpositional object of the second verb form (the spear) is also marked by *y-*, and not, as in the preceding verb forms, by *b-*, although the prefixes even have the same referent. This example has already been discussed in chapter 3.2.2.2.

In the utterances up to now, the referents were arranged according to their agency. Quch' Nushjun ranks very high on the agency hierarchy, while the spear (and the spearhead as well) does not. Nothing so far has been said about the brown bear, as it has not featured in an argument role where its animacy might be indicated by a pronominal prefix. Let us turn now to the examples with *y-* subjects.

One thing is most obvious when looking at (4.17f-g): all verb themes where the spear or spearhead are subject, are active: *O+t+tl'ets'* 'strike object, hit object with blunt instrument', *ch'a#Ø+tuk'* 'run out', *chi#O+t+'ik* 'kill plural object'. In (4.18), more common usages of each of the verb themes are presented. In the case of running, the same theme cannot be shown, as the verb stem for running usually involves an incorporate stem *shet* 'speed'. I could not find another example of the metaphorical use of the stem, with an inanimate subject moving quickly. Still, I present one example of *tuk'* with a human subject.

(4.18a) *O+t+tl'ets'* (Kari n.d.)

yeghitl'ets'  
 y- ghitl'ets'  
 YO- strike.repeatedly  
 'he jabbed it repeatedly'

(4.18b) *shet#d+t+tuk'* (ibid.)

shetdanituk'  
 shet- Ø- danituk'  
 running- ØS- run  
 'he arrived running'

(4.18c) *chi#O+t+’ik* (ibid)

chiyiʔik  
chi- y- iʔik  
death- YO- kill  
‘s/he killed them’

The difficulty in finding another example for *tuk* ‘run’ without the incorporate stem nicely illustrates the main fact about all three verb stems: They prototypically select human subjects, or if not human, then at least animate. In (4.17f-g), however, the subject of all these verb forms is the spear or spearhead, which is inanimate.

If the subject were unmarked, the listeners of the story would assume that nothing out of the ordinary happens— they would look for a human subject. Thus, the *y-* marking of the subject is necessary for the listeners of the story to understand that the normal conditions with human or animate subjects do not apply here.

What about the one verb form in this stretch of text that is not marked by *y-*? Being an intransitive verb, *ch’a#Ø+tuk* has to have an unmarked third person subject. Two things hinder *ch’a#Ø+tuk* from being interpreted as having a human subject, although this is not clearly marked. First of all, there is the subject NP *tsen ghini* immediately preceding the verb form. Second, we already noticed that an integral part of the normal verb theme is missing: the incorporate. Possibly, the lack of the incorporate *shet* ‘in a running manner’ also indicates that the subject of the verb form is not human. As the present verb is the only form lacking the incorporate, however, this cannot be considered certain.

The last verb form in (4.17f) has Quch’ Nushjun as a subject, without re-introducing him explicitly by a full NP. Still, reference is clear: The verb theme *O+L+det* ‘handle plural object’ is transitive, and by means of the postposition *ku* ‘from’ even ditransitive. If the subject were still the bone spearhead, it would have to be marked by *y-*. The absence of this marker suggests that the ordering of arguments is once again as usual, with the highest-ranking referent as subject, the lowest ranking referent as direct object, and the medium referent as postpositional object. Thus, in the last verb form we have  $\emptyset$ -S > *b*-OO > *y*-DO, which is just what we would have expected.

In (4.17g), the situation is once more reversed, and the low-ranking spearhead is acting on the higher-ranking bear. This is again indicated by pronominal prefixes, with *y-* subject referring to the spearhead and *b-* object to the bear.

#### 4.2.2 *Y- subject with postpositional objects: obligatory or optional?*

So far, we have seen an asymmetry between direct and oblique objects with respect to *y-* subjects. If the direct object ranks higher than the subject, a *y-* subject marker is obligatory. If the postpositional object ranks higher than the subject, we have two possibilities of marking this difference: *b- Ø-*, as was described in Chapter 3, and *b-y-* (as in (4.12)). Thus, both (4.19a) and (4.19b) are possible under the right circumstances:

(4.19a) Qubeł gheyuł.

<i>qub-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>Ø-</i>	<i>gheyuł</i>
QBO-	with	ØS-	walk.PROG
with them		s/he was	walking

‘S/he was walking with them.’

(4.19b) Qubeł yuyuł.

<i>qub-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>gheyuł</i>
QBO-	with	YS-	walk.PROG
with them		it was	walking

‘It was walking with them.’

What exactly is the difference between these constructions? In some cases, and (4.19) is one of them, relative agency is the determining factor. Both verb forms occur frequently in my corpus. (4.19a) usually marks a much lesser disparity with regard to agency and salience than (4.19b), which is indicated here by the translations. However, *yu* ‘walk’ is one of the few verbs where both kinds of marking occur frequently. Also, we see examples like (4.20), where we have superficially the same argument structure in all three verb forms, with *b-y-* marking in the first two verb forms, and *b- Ø-* marking in the third one.

The really striking thing about (4.20) is that the pronominal affixes refer to the same entities in both cases: *qev-* refers to a group of people, and the *y-* and *Ø-* subjects refer to a boat.

(4.20) coreferential *y-* subjects and *Ø-* subjects (Al. Evan 1976:23)

Qeveł yulchił qeveł yulchił yus idi eł, q’uyehdi lu qeveł tu’itun.

<i>qev-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>ulchił</i>	<i>qev-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>ulchił</i>
QBO-	with	YS-	speed(v)	QBO-	with	YS-	speed(v)
with them		it sped		with them		it sped	

yus	idi eł	q'uyehdi	łu
way.out	and.then	and.then	it.is.said
way out	then	then	it is said

qev- eł	tu- Ø-	'itun
QBO- with	water- ØS-	ECO.is.lying
with them	it sat still on top of the water	

'Across the water it sped with them, way out. And then it sat still on the water.'

A difference in inherent agency is excluded, because both constructions occur in (4.20), although there is no change in reference. Another explanation could be, though, that the two ways of marking identical referents might have to do with verbal semantics, and with a distinction between stative and active verbs (cf. Smith 1991).

If a stative verb has an inanimate or non-human subject, this is nothing out of the ordinary. If now this same stative verb with its inanimate subject takes a postpositional object, the natural interpretation is still that the inanimate entity is the subject of the stative verb form. Thus, no deviation from the usual pattern has to be marked, because this case *is* the pattern.

If, on the other hand, the verb in question is active, the situation is a bit more complicated: An active verb has an inanimate or non-human subject, a subject that is low in agency. This in itself is unusual. If then this verb takes an animate or human object, thus an object that ranks higher than the subject, the natural interpretation for any speaker of Dena'ina would be to assume that the high-ranking referent is the subject, and the low-ranking one the object. If, to return to our example, the pronominal marking would be *b- Ø-* in all verb forms instead of the last one, the interpretation would be the one in (4.21), and no reading like that in (4.20) would be possible:

(4.21) Ø- instead of *b-* (elicited)

Qev- eł Ø- ulchił (...)

QBO- with	YS-	speed(v)
they with it	[they]	sped

'They sped with it (...)'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The subject marker *q-* can change position. See chapter 5 for greater detail.

We cannot observe the same thing with direct objects, because in my data, there are no examples of stative transitive verbs. Only if there is a distinction between bivalent stative and bivalent active verbs, *y*- marking of the subject helps to disambiguate the utterance.

Again, *y*- subjects are only used when they are really needed to clarify subject reference. They are only employed if there is a chance of a listener interpreting a verb form marked by *b*- postpositional object the wrong way. Verbal semantics naturally have an impact on how a speaker will understand an utterance – we expect that a verb stem like *tun* ‘enclosed object is lying’ has an inanimate subject, while a verb stem like *tuk* ‘run’, or *chit* ‘speed’ usually has an animate or even human subject. If our expectations are not met with, the *b-y*-construction serves to indicate that this is the case.

We have seen that *y*- subjects are used whenever the subject is lower in agency than the object. In all the examples presented so far, a referent that is low in agency stays low in agency, and where the referents were well distinguished with respect to their agency. However, this is not necessarily the case. In the following section, we will investigate examples where the question of agency is a bit more complicated.

### 4.3 Other uses of *y*- subject

#### 4.3.1 *Special cases (I): changes in agency*

First of all, let us have a look at the story Kela Nuch’iŋtan (An. Evan 1976d:51-91). One of the main characters of the story is a wolf that starts living with the family. Over time, he is considered ‘the older brother’ of the son of the family (note that the name of the son is Kela Nuch’iŋtan ‘younger brother that came back’, even though he is the only son). In (4.22), he is starting to become familiar with the man of the family, Kela Nuch’iŋtan’s father:

(4.22) An. Evan (1976:55)

(a) Tiqin ghin vech’ dajeghyinelyax.

tiqin	ghin	<i>v</i> -	ch’	da-	jegh-	<i>y</i> -	inelyax
wolf	the	BO-	to	LEX-	ear-	YS-	move.PL.O
the Wolf		towards	him	he	moved	his	ears back and forth

‘The Wolf moved his ears back and forth to him.’

(b) Ch'q'u hch'aniyu hnuyu tiqin ghini vetl'uyeh hch'ayeniyu.

ch'q'u	hch'a-	Ø-	niyu	hnuyu	tiqin	ghini
and	away-	ØS-	walk	when	wolf	the
and	he walked away			when	the Wolf	
<i>v-</i>	tl'uyeh		hch'a-	<i>y-</i>	niyu	
BO-	behind		away	YS-	walk	
behind him			he walked away			

'And he walked off, and the Wolf started off behind him.'

We have seen several examples like (4.22): Two referents that are very different in agency, are encoded by different prefixes. The man is encoded by *b-* objects and unmarked subjects, while the wolf is consistently encoded by *y-* subjects.

The Wolf keeps being encoded by *y-* subjects throughout the story, while growing closer and closer to "his" family. When the son – the Wolf's younger brother – has grown up and is married, the Wolf comes to visit:

(4.23) change of subject encoding (An. Evan 1976d:69)

(a) Vegh yeniyu ch'q'u tiqin ghin dechik'ich'a n'e' a niłchet idi eła qut'an ezdlan.

<i>v-</i>	egh	<i>y-</i>	niyu	ch'q'u	tiqin	ghin	dechik'ich'a
BO-	to	YS-	walk	and	wolf	the	his cap
to him	he came			and	the Wolf		his cap
n'e'	a	Ø-	niłchet	idi eła	qut'an	ezdlan.	
back		ØS-	push	and then	person	he became	
he pushed it back				and then	he became human		

'[The Wolf] came to [the boy] and the Wolf pushed back his cap. He became a person.'

(b) Q'u gheli veyiıyeł gheli łu.

q'u	gheli	<i>v-</i>	<i>y-</i>	ıyeł	gheli	łu.
now	really	BO-	YS-	grab	really	it is said
now	really	he grabbed him		really	it is said	

'And [the boy] really grabbed [the Wolf].'

(c) Tiqin gun t'eyłni łu:

tiqin	gun	t'e-	<i>y-</i>	łni	łu
wolf	the	thus-	YO-	say	it is said
the Wolf	he spoke thus to him				it is said

'The Wolf said to him.'

The striking thing about (4.23) is that the encoding switches. In (4.23a), the Wolf is encoded by *y*- subjects, and the boy by *b*- objects, as they were throughout the story up to this point. As soon as the Wolf becomes human, he is not only one of the main characters, but he has also considerably increased in agency. Here, the encoding does not just switch from *y*- subject to unmarked subject. Instead, the formerly unmarked referent, the boy, is suddenly assigned *y*- subject role in (4.22b), with the Wolf being encoded by a *b*- object prefix. In the following sentence, the Wolf again is subject, this time unmarked.

The switch in agency is shown by another means as well: the demonstratives. As mentioned in chapter 1.3.5, Dena'ina can distinguish three types of referents via demonstratives: non-human referents (*ghin(i)*, *gin(i)*), singular human referents (*ghun(en)*, *gun(en)*), and plural human referents (*ghuna*, *guna*) (Kari 1994:51).

Now look at the demonstratives of *tiqin* 'wolf': In (4.23a), the full NP is *tiqin ghini* 'that (thing) Wolf', while it is *tiqin gun* 'this (human) Wolf' in (4.23c), after the human-ness of the Wolf has been revealed. And the demonstrative does not only indicate that the animacy or agency of the Wolf has changed, it has also changed the viewpoint: While the Wolf was up to this point of the narrative accompanied mostly by distal demonstratives like *ghini*, *gun* now is the proximate one. Thus, both demonstrative and personal pronominal prefixes indicate the change in agency in the wolf.

Throughout the remainder of the story, both the human side and the animal side of the Wolf are reflected linguistically. The demonstrative in NPs referring to the Wolf is *gun*, thus implying human-ness, while the transitive verb forms with the Wolf as subject display *y*- subjects and *b*- objects:

(4.24) encoding throughout the rest of the story (An. Evan 1976d:79)

Veyghazdleq' ʰu.

<i>v</i> -	<i>y</i> -	ghazdleq'	ʰu
BO-	YS-	laugh	it is said
		he laughed at him	it is said

'[The Wolf] laughed at [the man].'

By using both *y*- subjects and human singular demonstratives, the narrator of the story comments on the in-between status of the Wolf between fully human and fully animal.

This actually is true for the whole story, although it can be seen how the Wolf advances from dumb animal to a nearly-human being. In the beginning, the verb themes describing actions of him are nothing out of the ordinary for an animal: *kanastan* ‘he was lying on his belly’, *vech’ dajeghyinelyax* ‘he moved his ears back and forth towards her’, *yetsi buk’denghetq’esh* ‘he was rubbing his head all over [the baby]’. Slowly, the Wolf becomes more active, although his actions are still wolf-like: *vet’uyeb hch’ayeniyu* ‘he was walking away, following him (the man)’, *du’iyil* ‘he howled’, *chidat’yuq vejex ghini* ‘he killed the caribou’.

However, the Wolf kills the caribou because the man asked him to do it, and from this point on, his actions are less wolf-like, and he is really starting to help ‘his’ family. When the man starts packing the caribou home, he takes a rest and then is not able to get up again with the heavy pack. Observe (4.25):

(4.25a) An. Evan (1976d:56f.)

(...) tiqin ghini vegh ninikit.

tiqin	ghini	<i>v-</i>	egh	ni-	Ø-	nikit
wolf	the	BO-	to	up.to-	ØS-	walk
the Wolf		to him		he came up		

‘(...) the Wolf came up to him.’

(4.25b) Ch’q’u vek’uch’ niqaydalghel.

ch’q’u	<i>v-</i>	kuch’	niqa-	<i>y-</i>	dalghel
and	BO-	away.from	around-	YS-	turn
and	away from him		he turned		

‘And the Wolf turned away from him.’

(4.25c) Ch’q’u yekajada ighedneq hnuyu tiqin ghin va yenichet.

ch’q’u	<i>y-</i>	kajada	Ø-	ighedneq	hnuyu
and	Y.Poss-	tail	ØS-	take	when
and	his tail		he took it		when

tiqin	ghin	<i>v-</i>	a-	<i>y-</i>	nichet
wolf	the	BO-	on	YS-	pull
the Wolf	on him		he pulled		

‘Then, when he took hold of his tail, the Wolf started pulling him.’

Thus, the Wolf starts behaving less wolf-like the longer he stays with his new family. This finally culminates when he ‘pushes back his cap’ and reveals himself to be

human<sup>12</sup>. From that point on, his actions are not at all wolf-like anymore (except for occasional howling). However, he is throughout the story encoded by *y*- subjects, except for that one sentence when he is pushing his cap back. Although he steadily gains in agency, this is only once reflected by pronominal use; afterwards, his animal side is again emphasized by the use of *y*- subject prefixes.

#### 4.3.2 *Special cases (II): Salience & topicality*

On first look, the following case looks similar. This example is taken from the story *The Man and the Loon*, by Peter Kalifornsky. In contrast to all other stories we consider here, this one has not been told and then recorded, but actually, it has been written down first (and read aloud afterwards). As Peter Kalifornsky revised all his stories (Alan Boraas, p.c.), we can safely assume that it is a more planned narrative than the other ones we look at in this context.<sup>13</sup>

In that story, a man has been blinded and left by his malicious wife. He makes a vow that he will survive, and walks into the direction where he hears a Loon call.

(4.26) encoding of the Loon by *y*- subjects (Kalifornsky 1991:146)

(a) Ch'u dujemi ghin<sup>14</sup> bayinilagh.

ch'u	dujemi	ghin	<i>b</i> -	a-	<i>y</i> -	inilagh
and	loon	this	BO-	to-	YS-	swim
and	the Loon		he	swam	up to	him

'And the Loon swam up to him.'

(b) Dujemi ghin, "Ch'a t'ent'an dit?" beyɛɲni ch'u yeɭ nuqulnek.

dujemi	ghin	ch'a	t'ent'an	dit	<i>b</i> -	<i>y</i> -	ɲni
loon	this	what	you do	EVID:2	BO-	YS-	say
the Loon		what	are you doing		he	said to	him

<sup>12</sup> Ellanna and Balluta (1992:30) especially stress the role of wolves with the Inland Dena'ina: "In the 1980s, Nondalton residents believed that wolves are actually a human-like group which look after the well-being of the Dena'ina and share food with them."

<sup>13</sup> Another difference is, of course, that this story is written in the Kenai dialect, which significantly differs from both the Upper Inlet and Inland dialects. However, it is similar enough to be understandable without going into great detail about the differences between the dialects. For more information on the Kenai dialect, see Kari (1975b).

<sup>14</sup>In the Kalifornsky texts, *ghin* is always spelt *ghen*, probably because of the vowel lowering triggered by /gh/. It was changed in the present study in order to unify the spelling across dialects.

ch'u	y-	eł	nu-	Ø-	qulnek
and	YO-	to	ITER-	ØS-	tell
and		to him			he told

'And the Loon said, "What are you doing?" and [the man] told him.'

We have seen plenty of examples like (4.26), so we are not going to look at this in greater detail; this was just to show that the Loon is encoded by *y-* subjects in the beginning. Much more interesting is the fact that this is not consistently the case. As soon as he offers to help the man (and wants payment for it), the encoding switches to unmarked subjects:

(4.27) Karlifornsky (1991:146)

(a) "Yaghali," beyełni.

yaghali	b-	y-	łni
good	BO-	YS-	say
good		he said to	him

"Good," he [loon] said to him [man].'

(b) "Yaghali nenuntgheshtuh hq'u qyushtghilił," yełni

yaghali	nenuntgheshtuh	hq'u	qyushtghilił
good	I'll help you	but	you will pay me
good	I'll help you	but	you'll have to pay me

y-	Ø-	łni
YO-	Ø-	say
		he said to him

"Good, I'll help you, but you will have to pay me", he [loon] said to him [man].'

As in the Wolf story we looked at earlier, the change in encoding occurs in a particularly important moment. In the first case, the Wolf revealed his real identity. In the current example, on the other hand, the Loon stays a Loon, although he is a Loon with special abilities. What changes in this example is the point of view. Up to (4.27a), the Loon is regarded as an animal like any other animal. As soon as he offers his help, two things change. For one, this is not particularly loon-like behavior. A change in agency takes place similar to the one in *Kela Nuch'ıtan*. But most of all, the importance of the Loon changes. As a helper of the man, he is very relevant to the proceedings in the story. In fact, he is the one who restores the man's eyesight and shows him the way home.

Now it seems plausible that a highly important, salient and also topical referent is not going to be encoded by *y*- subjects. Although *y*- subjects do not necessarily imply that the referent is unimportant or not salient – the Wolf in Kela Nuch’ítan is proof enough that this is not the case – they may have that connotation.

It must be noted, though, that this is a secondary feature. There is not one example of a human, non-salient and non-topical referent being encoded by *y*- subjects.<sup>15</sup> Rather, the opposite is true: Inanimate or non-human referents may be encoded by *y*-. If their salience or relevance increases, they may be ‘promoted’ to unmarked subjects. As, however, it is in the nature of inanimate things to be neither salient nor relevant to the discourse, there are no examples in my corpus of a referent that in one utterance is marked by *y*- subjects and in the following one is encoded by unmarked (transitive) subjects.

The concept of salience plays a great role in the pronominal system of many Athabascan languages. In some languages, such as Navajo (Willie 1991), Dogrib (Saxon 1993), Chiricahua Apache (Müller 2002), and Gwich’in (Leer, p.c.), a separate “Fourth Person” exists to encode particularly salient referents.

Dena’ina is not one of these languages. There is no way to pronominally encode a particularly salient referent; this has to be achieved by other means. However, Dena’ina has the possibility of demoting a referent in salience – and of promoting the same referent when it moves into the center of attention, just by using *y*- and  $\emptyset$ - subjects. There are various differences between the Dena’ina system and the fourth person system.

First of all, the fourth person system is *overt*. One salient referent is encoded by a pronominal prefix that has a meaning component [+ salient], and all other referents are assigned unmarked third person prefixes. In Dena’ina, on the other hand, the opposite is true: All referents are assigned unmarked third person prefixes except for the one that is considered least salient. That one is encoded by *y*- subjects.

Second, the Dena’ina system only applies in the domain of *subject pronominals*, while the fourth person prefixes of Navajo or one of the other languages have a marker for both subject and object.

Third, the system of Navajo or Dogrib may be used to *keep track* of several referents during either the whole story (Leer p.c.) or at least during paragraphs of a

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<sup>15</sup>As we will see later in 4.6.2, there is one example of a human referent encoded by *y*-. However, this referent is both salient and topical.

story (Dogrib (Saxon 1993) or Chiricahua Apache (Müller 2002)). Because of the lack of object prefixes corresponding to *y*- subject, and because *y*- subject may only be used with bivalent verbs, this is not possible to such a degree in Dena'ina. Sooner or later, the down-graded referent will occur either in object position, where the difference is leveled, or as the subject of a intransitive verb that does not have another argument, and thus will not be distinguishable from any other referent.

Still, the concept of salience does play a role in the question whether a particular referent is encoded by *y*- subjects or not. The story we will now look at has three major referents: A pair of brothers, and a dog. Our expectation would be that both of the brothers will be marked by  $\emptyset$ - subjects, while the dog will be marked by *y*- subjects. In the beginning, this is actually the case:

(4.28) *y*- marking of dog,  $\emptyset$ - marking of brothers (Pete 1989:3)

(a) K'kela ghun yethdi yada ghudehdi yidughełchet shit'i.

k'kela	ghun	yethdi	yada	ghudehdi
y.brother	this	then	what	stuff
the younger brother		then		something
yidu-	$\emptyset$ -	ghełchet	shit'i	
his mouth	$\emptyset$ S-	put	EVID:1	
he put it into his mouth			EVID:1	

‘And then the younger brother gave [that old dog] something [to eat from out of his shirt].’

(b) Qubeł q'u yuyul.

qub-	eł	q'u	<i>y</i> -	yuyul
QBO-	with	now	YS-	walk
with them		now		he was walking

‘Now he kept up with them.’

However, this encoding does not prove to be very persistent in this text, as the examples later on will show.

Because the content of the story is so closely linked to the pronominal marking in it, I would like to shortly summarize it in this place. The people living in a *nichit* are facing starvation. Two brothers set out to find food for their people. An old dog follows him, but has trouble keeping up, as he is old and weak with hunger. The younger brother gives the dog something to eat, while the older brother scolds him for it and tells him to get rid of that dog. The younger brother doesn't pay heed, though, and keeps the dog. Finally, the dog finds a bear's den. The younger brother,

who has gone after the dog, runs back to his older brother. Both of them run back together, and they spear and kill the bear. When the bear is butchered, the younger brother gives the dog a piece, but the older brother again disapproves of this. The younger brother explains that they only have caught the bear because of the dog, and that the dog thus deserves something to eat. Finally, they pack the meat home, and the whole *nichit* (and, because of the generosity of the *qeshqa*, the ‘rich man’ of the *nichit*, the neighboring *nichit* as well) are saved.

In fact, the dog is responsible for all of this; without his good nose, the brothers would not have noticed that there was a bear in the area. Thus, the dog is relevant and salient. This is at once reflected in the language:

(4.29) Ø- marking of the dog (Pete 1989:6)

Qeyet t’uyuh nuhk’eyghutił.

<i>qey-</i>	<i>eł</i>	t’uyuh	nuhk’ey-	Ø-	ghutił
3PL.O-		with behind	ITER-/LEX	ØS-	hobble
with them		behind	he		hobbled along

‘He hobbled along behind them.’

The same thing happens here that we saw in the Loon story. The animal gains in relevance, although it does not develop special skills that other animals of the same kind do not have (as the Wolf did in the story *Kela Nuch’ıtan*), but just because of its actions and helpfulness to the main character in the story. Although the referent has up to that point been marked as lower in rank than the other referents, this distinction is now leveled, because of the unusual achievements of the animal.

We have seen many times now that *y-* subjects are used to encode that the referent is low in rank compared to other referents, that the use of *y-* subjects as opposed to unmarked subjects is meaningful. Now it also turns out that the opposite also is true: If a referent has been marked by *y-* subjects up to a certain point in a narrative, and is encoded by unmarked subjects from there on, this switch in encoding is just as meaningful. It can signify that the referent has changed in agency, as we have seen in the Wolf story, or that the referent has gained in salience, as in the Loon story and the story of *The Hunting Dog*.

#### 4.4 Areal or *y-* subject?

In Chapter 3, we have briefly discussed cases where the subject of a verb form is marked by Areal *q-* and the object marked by *b-*. These cases are very rare and hard

to find, which is not very surprising, considering the prototypical features of Areal subjects.

The Areal usually refers to abstract concepts, like time and situation, and to areas (which is how it got its name). All these entities have in common that they are not agentive at all – none of them has any of the features that Dowty (1991) lists for prototypical agents: they have neither volition, nor sentience, causation or movement (Dowty 1991:572). Areal subjects mainly occur in stative verbs or in lexicalized expressions. If an Areal subject co-occurs with a postpositional object, it is likely that this is a lexicalized expression, as in (4.30):

(4.30) Areal subject with *b*- postpositional object (Pete 1989:3)

Hełch' qubegh qiydlan.  
 hełch'            *qub-* egh    *q-*            iydlan  
 evening        QBO- to    AREAL.S-        became  
 evening        to them     it became  
 'It got dark on them.'

It does happen, though, that an Areal subject occurs in a motion verb. If that is the case, it always is highly uncontrolled motion. A very typical example of this is the expression 'there was an avalanche':

(4.31) Areal in motion theme (Kari n.d.)

Yus hghelteł.  
 yus    *q-*            hghelteł  
 snow AREAL.S-    PL.moves  
 snow it moved  
 'There was a snow avalanche.'

What now if a verb like the one in (4.31) takes an object in order to express that some people were the victims of an avalanche? Here, we have a case like the ones discussed above: A non-prototypical agent acting upon a typical agent, exactly the context for *y*- subject and *b*- object marking. This is exactly what happens. Observe (4.32):

(4.32) theme in (4.31) with postpositional object (Pete 1978:6)

Qaʎnigi ghini dghelay nqubel̩ yit̩et̩.

qaʎnigi	ghini	dghelay	nqub-	eʎ	y-	it̩et̩
rocks	those	mountain	QBO-	to	YS-	PL.O.moves
those rocks		mountain	towards	them	things	moved

‘Those rocks, that mountain broke loose towards them.’

(4.32) is taken from the story of the Łi Dnay, the Glacier People. The Glacier People have stolen a man’s wife, and when he finally finds her again (or rather, when she finds him) and they try to escape together, the Glacier People send an avalanche after them, which they can only stop by magic. In (4.32), the verb theme is the same as in (4.31); the basic difference is in the aspectual marking (*gb-* perfective in (4.31), *Ø-* imperfective in (4.32)) and, of course, in the pronominal prefixes: *q-* Areal in the (4.31), *y-* in (4.32).

However, there is a very important difference between these two sentences, and that again has to do with Volition and Control. (4.31) deals with a natural occurrence, whose force is undirected, while (4.32) is about a controlled event that is directed against the two main characters of the story. The *y-* subject marks this increase in agency from just movement to volitional and controlled movement, just as it marked the increase in agency when the Caribou stopped being passive and charged the Raven in (4.10c).

This is not an avalanche that just happens, this is a planned, controlled, directed event, directed towards two human beings that are by definition higher on any given agency scale than the mountain. The difference in agency warrants the use of *y-* subjects and *b-* objects, but the use of *y-* also suggests an increase in agency from Areal. Areal subjects *are*, *y-* and unmarked subjects *do*.

It was mentioned before that the Areal is used to denote that the subject is a place, a situation or an abstract concept. The agency hierarchy suggests that a constellation with the Areal acting on another referent is highly marked. Abstract concepts and the like are the last category on any hierarchy. Dena’ina prefers to have high-ranking referents acting on low-ranking referents to the opposite, and exceptions from this pattern are always clearly marked – by *y-* subject prefixes.

Here, we encounter a problem with the concept of agency. Leer (1993) uses the term to avoid the term animacy, because the *animacy* of an entity cannot really be measured, but the prototypical *agency* of an entity can – human beings are more

agentive than animals, Raven is more agentive than other animals (for example Seal and Caribou, to use examples from the stories under investigation), animals are more agentive than stones and sticks. Agency in the sense of Leer refers to the referent's inherent ability to do things.

In the paragraphs under consideration, the subject referents' inherent ability to perform the action – or any other action, for that matter – described is nil. Thus, inherent agency can change. A referent low in inherent agency – as the mountain – may still gain in actual *agentiveness* under certain circumstances, and this gain is marked by the *y-* subject prefix, which marks its referent as being low in agency, but still capable of acting towards another entity.

Let us have a look at a similar problem. Weather terms usually have Areal subjects, as can be seen in (4.35):

(4.35) Areal subjects in weather terms

(a) Uch'en nuhghinik.

uch'en	nu-	<i>q-</i>	ghinik
outside	ITER-	AREAL.S-	be.foggy
outside	it is foggy again		
'It's foggy.'			

(b) Nch'u gheli k'i hteshcheł.

nch'u	gheli	k'i	<i>q-</i>	teshcheł.
not	really	too	AREAL.S-	clear.up
not	really	too	it cleared up	
'It didn't even clear up.'				

As the Areal by definition encodes places, abstracts, and situations, this does not strike us as unusual. Weather terms are very clearly a part of the range of uses for Areal subjects; and apart from the verbs for 'rain' (*atkeun*) and 'snow' (*nutchit*), all weather verbs exhibit Areal subject prefixes. In (4.36), this is not the case.

(4.36) weather term with *b-* *y-* construction (An. Evan 1976c:24)

Deggech' ghu gheyuł ch'q'u nunigi ghini deggech' ghu veł yucheł.

Deggech'	ghu	Ø-	gheyuł	ch'q'u	nunigi	ghini
up	there-	ØS-	go.PROG	and	fog	the
up	there	she went		and	the fog	

deggech'	ghu	<i>v-</i>	eł	<i>y-</i>	uchel.
up	there	BO-	with	YS-	clear.up
up	there	with her		it went	

'She went up there and the fog went with her.'

And the same thing a few sentences later:

(4.37) weather term with *b-* *y-* construction (ibid.)

Nunigi ghin unch' veł yuyul ch'q'u.

nunigi	ghin	unch'	<i>v-</i>	eł	<i>y-</i>	uyul	ch'q'u
fog	the	over.hill	BO-	with	YS-	go	and
the fog		over the hill	with her		it went		and

'The fog went over the hill with her.'

In both examples, a verb referring to a weather condition is marked by a *y-* subject, thus indicating an increase in agency. Naturally, weather is not inherently agentive. In (4.36) and (4.37), on the other hand, the fog is doing something untypical for fog. This is also indicated by the choice of verb stem; *yʉ* is the basic motion verb stem for human beings and animals and means 'walk' as opposed to riding a sled or going by boat.

We have seen that *y-* subjects are used under the following circumstances: If the inherent agency of a subject referent is lower than the inherent agency of its object referent, the subject is marked by *y-* and the object is marked by *b-*. The same is true if an inherently non-agentive subject acts towards a more agentive subject, and if the verb is active in nature. Thus, *y-* subjects are employed when the relationship between subject and object is not 'normal'. However, the *y-b-* construction has more functions than the encoding of this asymmetry. In the next sections, we will investigate some of them.

#### 4.5 Reference tracking

In 4.3.2, the four person system of some other Athabascan languages was mentioned. Apart from encoding various degrees of salience of different referents, a four person system may be used to keep track of the referents. In these cases, the most prominent referent is assigned a special pronominal marker – the fourth person – while all other referents are assigned the (unmarked) third person. Thus, it is possible to keep several referents apart over long stretches of text, without having to use even one clarifying NP. If one referent is marked by fourth person and the

other one by third, no ambiguity can result as long as the encoding does not switch and no third referent enters the stage.

I have said before that Dena'ina does not have a four person system. Due to the lack of an object prefix that only corresponds to the *y*- subjects (remember, *y*-objects correspond to both *y*- subjects and unmarked subjects), the assignment of *y*-subject prefixes to one referent and Ø- subject prefixes to the other one cannot be kept upright long enough, as the *y*- marked one will at some point be the subject of an intransitive verb form and thus marked by Ø-, resulting in a breakdown of the referential chains. It is also quite rare – and this is due to the fact that non-human or even inanimate referents prototypically are not very agentive – that there is a comparable number of transitive verb forms with the human referent as subject and transitive verb forms with the non-human referent as subject. This, however, is the only occasion where we can expect the *y*- subject marking being used for reference tracking purposes. In most cases, *y*- subjects operate on the sentence level; they denote that the subject is lower in status than the subject of the preceding verb forms, but this cannot be done consistently throughout a paragraph or even a whole text.

In the whole corpus of about twenty stories analyzed for the present purposes, it happens only once that two referents are kept apart by using *y*- subjects vs. unmarked subjects over a longer stretch of text.<sup>16</sup> The following example is taken from the story Quch' Nushjun. After his son Beł has been killed by a mean brown bear, Quch' Nushjun starts to avenge his son by killing every bear that he can find. One of these fights is described in the following way:

(4.38) *y*- subjects and Ø- subjects: reference tracking Pete (1996:10f.)

(a) Qughiyu ch'u nuniłhtelyał nuniłteltash.

qu-	Ø-	ghiyu	ch'u	nu-	nił-	q-	telyał
down-	ØS-	come	and	ITER-	REC.O-	QS-	start.to.grab
it came out			and	they started	grabbing	each other	again

nu-	nił-	Ø-	teltash
ITER-	REC.O-	ØS-	start.to.handle.SAO
they started	wrestling	each other	again

'It came out and they grabbed each other and started wrestling around.'

<sup>16</sup> "Longer stretch of text" is, of course, a rather flexible expression. I take it to mean a stretch of text clearly above the sentence level, at least three sentences.

(b) Nch'u chibeyeɸik.

nch'u chi- b- y- ɸik  
not death- BO- YS- kill.PL.O<sup>17</sup>  
not it killed him  
'It didn't kill him.'

(c) Q'abeyektish ch'u.

q'a- b- y- ktish ch'u.  
LEX- BO- YS- handle.SAO and  
it wrestled him around and  
'It wrestled him around.'

(d) Quht'ana bihtaych'ut niɸdeggeneltlit i'un qeyekt'eq'.

quht'ana b- i- q- taych'ut  
man BO- to- AREAL.S- anger.came  
man he got mad  
niɸdegge- Ø- neltlit i'un  
up ØS- jump away  
he jumped up away  
qe- y- Ø- kt'eq'  
down- YO- ØS- throw.SAO  
and he threw it aside

'The man got mad, and he jumped up and throws [that bear] aside.'

In this stretch of text, subject reference changes several times, and each change is reflected by the use of pronominal affixes. In (4.38a), the first verb form has the bear as subject. As it is an intransitive verb form, it is unmarked for subject. In the following verb form, we can see a *q-* subject, which marks non-singular. The same is implied by the use of the reciprocal object prefix *niɸ-*, which sufficiently expresses that there must be more than one referent present.<sup>18</sup> Thus, both the bear and Quch' Nushjun are subject.

In (4.38b), subject reference changes again. Now, the subject is once more the bear. This time, the bear is subject of a transitive verb form, which results in it being marked by a *y-* subject prefix. The object of that verb form, Quch' Nushjun, is marked by *b-* object prefix, which exactly corresponds to our expectations. In (4.38c), the encoding is exactly the same as in (4.38b).

<sup>17</sup> The reason for the plural verb stem eludes me.

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that *q-* in rare cases only marks the first verb form in a chain of co-referring verbs, leaving it to the listener to infer that unmarked subject without interfering NPs means that reference has not changed. Cf. (4.38a).

However, subject reference changes once more in (4.38d). In the first verb form, *bihṭaych'ut*, we see an Areal subject acting on a third person object.<sup>19</sup> As there is a full NP referring to Quch' Nushjun (*quḥt'ana* 'man, person'), it is quite clear that the object of this verb form is Quch' Nushjun and not the bear. From here on, only the man appears in subject position anymore, first as the unmarked subject of the intransitive verb form *niḥdeggenellit* 'he jumped up', then as the unmarked subject of the transitive verb form *qeyet't'eq* 'he threw it aside'.

It was shown that each change of subject reference corresponded with a change in subject prefix. Thus, the distinction of *y*- subjects and unmarked subjects can in some cases be used for reference-tracking purposes. It must be noted, though, that this is very rare, due to the restrictions on the use of *y*- subjects and to the lack of corresponding object prefixes.

## 4.6 Less than human

### 4.6.1 Spirits

Earlier in this chapter, we looked at two examples (36 and 37) taken from the Foggy Woman Story (An. Evan 1976c:21-28). In this story, a young man falls in love with a woman that he met on the mountain, while he and his family stay there for summer hunting. At first, she refuses to go home with him, but finally, he takes her to his family:

(4.39) Ø- subject and *y*- object (An. Evan 1976c:22)

Q'uyehdi yeḥ nutasdyu.

q'uyehdi	<i>y</i> -	eḥ	nu-	Ø-	tasdyu
and.then	YO-	with	ITER-	ØS-	start.walking
and then		with him			she started to go back

'And then she started back with him.'

While she is staying with him, it doesn't ever stop raining, and the fog also doesn't clear. Again she tells him that she really shouldn't stay with him, and finally, after their child is born, he lets her and the baby go:

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<sup>19</sup> Note that contrary to the verb forms we discussed in chapter 3, this is not an intransitive verb form where an additional argument has to be encoded, but that in this verb form, both arguments have been lexicalized. The claim that *q*- Areal subject cannot act towards another referent does not apply here.

(4.40) Ø- subject and *b*- object (An. Evan 1976c:24)

Vek'u hch'a na'ilgguk.

<i>v</i> -	k'u	hch'ana-	Ø-	'ilgguk
BO-	away	away.back-	ØS-	go
	away from him			she left to go back

'She started to go back, away from him.'

So far, nothing is really striking. The woman is encoded by unmarked subject prefixes, the man by both *y*- and *b*- objects, a perfectly normal variation, as we have seen in chapter 3. Several utterances after (4.40), the encoding suddenly changes:

(4.41) change in encoding (An. Evan 1976c:24)

(a) Vech'a yilgguk.

<i>v</i> -	ch'a	<i>y</i> -	ilgguk
BO-	from	YS-	go
	away from him		she went

'She went away from him.'

(b) Deggech' ghu gheyuł ch'q'u nunigi ghini deggech' ghu veł yucheł.

Deggech'	ghu	Ø-	gheyuł	ch'q'u	nunigi	ghini
up	there-	ØS-	go	and	fog	the
up	there		she went	and	the fog	

deggech'	ghu	<i>v</i> -	eł	<i>y</i> -	ucheł.
up	there	BO-	with	YS-	clear.up
up	there		with her		it went

'She went up there and the fog went with her.'

(c) Yudeq' vech'a yilgguk hnuyu veł q'u ełkuni ghini k'qisil.

yudeq	<i>v</i> -	ch'a	<i>y</i> -	ilgguk	hnuyu	
up	BO-	away	YS-	go	when	
up		away from him		she went	when	
<i>v</i> -	eł	q'u	ełkuni	ghini	k'-	qisil
BO-	with	now	rain	the	INDEF.O-	be.gone
	with her	right	the rain			it was gone

'As soon as she walked away from him, the rain left with her.'

Two times in (4.41), the woman is encoded by *y*- subjects. Now, what could be the reason for this? The obvious explanation – that the speaker wants to mark that the man is the main character, and the woman only secondary – does not quite work.

We have seen in Chapter 3 that postpositional objects may be marked by *b-* if the speaker wants to emphasize that they rank higher than their subjects. Thus, if we had a verb form like *vech'a ilgguk* in both cases (we have something similar in (4.40)), it would be sufficiently clear that the man is higher in rank than the woman.

This, however, is not what the speaker chose to do. The speaker chose to demote the woman, because, and this becomes clear to the listeners in (4.41), the woman is not quite human: She is Foggy Woman, a woman that takes fog and rain wherever she goes.

Note how the speaker reflects how the young man realizes this fact. When the young man meets her in the beginning of the story, he does not know that, and thus, the encoding is very straightforward,  $\emptyset$ - subjects referring to the woman and *y*-objects referring to the man (cf. (4.39)). As soon as she comes to live with him, it starts raining upon them continuously, but the man still doesn't suspect a thing. In that stretch of text, the woman is not encoded by subject or object prefixes (all pronominal prefixes refer to the couple). After she tells him that she has to go away, we see the first shift in encoding: She is still encoded by  $\emptyset$ - subjects, but the man is marked by *b-*. This indicates that there is a gap between them.

In the moment where it finally dawns upon the young man what his love really is, the final switch in encoding takes place. Here, the pronominal prefixes reflect that the woman is not human, while the man certainly is. Only when a still lower-ranking referent comes into play – the fog in (4.40b) – she once more is assigned  $\emptyset$ - subjects. But in relation to the man, as we can see in (4.40c), she is still less than human, and thus, the *y*- subject is taken up again. In this example, *y*-subject really has the meaning proposed by Tenenbaum (1978:68): non-human subject. The inherent agency of a spirit prototypically is not lower than the one of a human being; the difference between the man and the woman in this case is merely human-ness, or rather the lack thereof.

Something similar happens in the story of the *Ēi Dnay*; the story where the avalanche is going down. Even before that stretch of text we looked at earlier, several *y*- subjects occur. At this point of the narrative, a woman comes to the man who is still mourning for his wife. Again, the pronominal marking in the beginning of the story is nothing out of the ordinary:

(4.42) Pete (1978:1)

Yeghu niqekdeł.

<i>y-</i>	ghu	ni-	<i>q-</i>	Ø-	łdeł
YO-	for.O's.use	up.to-	QO-	ØS-	handle.Pl.O
to him		she put things			

She put things [to eat] in front of him.

At first, the man just ignores the woman who came to live at his place, but after a while, he starts to wonder where she came from. Every day, the woman leaves for a while and comes back, carrying a whole caribou, which she then proceeds to prepare for him. One day, he tries to follow her and fails:

(4.43) Pete (1978:2)

(a) Titsanitsey yutgge dzelggezh ghu danuqahdghashchesh.

ti-	tsi-	Ø-	nitsey	yutgge	dzelggezh	ghu
out-	head	ØS-	handle.LRO	above	mountain.pass	there
he stuck his head out				above	there through the pass	

da-	nu-	qa-	<i>q-</i>	dghashchesh
out-	ITER-	leg-	QS-	move.quickly
her legs were moving fast				

'When he stuck his head out, [she was going] through that pass, her legs were moving quickly.'

(b) Benuqeł'i nuyultlet.

<i>b-</i>	nuqeł'i	nu	<i>y-</i>	gheltlet
BO-	out.of.sight	ITER-	YS-	run
out of his sight		she ran		

'She ran out of sight.'

(c) Kiq'u uk'u shtunuyilggugi iłq'a.

kiq'u	<i>b-</i>	k'u	shtu-	nu-	<i>y-</i>	ilggugi	iłq'a
again	BO-	away.from	away	ITER-	YS-	running	well
again	away from him		she, running away again				well

'Again, she went away from him.'

The situation is quite similar to the one in Foggy Woman story: Some strange event takes place, and at the same time, the encoding changes. In (4.43a), the man notices that the woman is running much faster than is usual. In the following utterances, she is encoded by *y-* subjects, which again suggests to the listener of the story that

she is not human, but part of the spirit world. Note that both times when this happens, it has not been explicitly stated that the woman in question is non-human. This is merely implied by the use of *y*- subjects referring to these women.

In the Glacier People story, it finally is stated that the Łi Dnay have taken his wife and, later on, are trying to hinder their escape from them. But this is in a later part of the story, when the man has found out all these things. While he still is wondering what is wrong about the woman that came to live with him, she is frequently encoded by *y*- subjects.

So, what exactly does the *y*- prefix signify in this context? Does it mean that spirits are less agentive, or less animate, than human beings? And if they are, how do they rank in contrast with animals, or trees? Somehow, this explanation is not very satisfying, even if it were known how they rank in contrast with other non-human entities. What's more, I have not been able to get a speaker of Dena'ina to comment on these things.

This leads to another hypothesis. As in many other cultures, there are various things that a person should not do, or talk about, because these things are believed to bring bad luck. In his "Ethnography of the Tanaina", Osgood (1937:174f.) gives a long list of these things, but he himself admits that this list is not complete. Possibly, beings of the spirit world are on that list, and direct mention of them is avoided. The stories are told just the same, because they contain information about what to do if confronted with a spirit, but even there, the speaker oftentimes omits to use the actual name or term for this kind of being.

The most likely explanation in my opinion is that this is purely a rhetorical means. The *y*- subject prefix is in the first place not used to refer to human beings. If this does happen though, then this is a clear indication for the listeners that there is something unusual about the person the pronominal refers to, and that they should pay good attention to what happens next.

#### 4.6.2 *Sons and brothers*

In the remainder of this chapter, we look at excerpts from two stories that already featured in the discussion: The story of Quch' Nushjun, and the story of the Hunting Dog. These stories have two things in common: They are told by the same narrator, Shem Pete, and the pronominal marking is, on first sight, rather confusing. We will carefully look at both texts to see if our findings about the meaning of *y*- subjects apply to them.

We will start with Quch' Nushjun. In 4.2, we observed several *y*- subject prefixes referring to inanimate entities like spears and spearheads, while the human referent – Quch' Nushjun himself – was being referred to by unmarked subject prefixes. This, however, was only the beginning of the story. In the section discussed earlier, it was described how Quch' Nushjun makes a special spear for hunting brown bears. This already indicates that Quch' Nushjun is a professional bear hunter, who also raises his son to be a bear hunter.

When the boy is grown up, the two of them go bear hunting. Unfortunately, the bear they are trying to kill is very mean and ends up killing the boy with the spear. The father tries to move his son out of the bear's reach:

(4.44) *y*- subject encoding the son (Pete 1996:6)

(a) Yeseh ch'anayni~~l~~ghel yetsighala yi~~l~~ye~~l~~.

yeseh	ch'ana-	<i>y</i> -	Ø-	ni <del>l</del> ghel
forward	back.out-	YO-	ØS-	pull
forward	he pulled him back out			

<i>y</i> -	tsighala	<i>y</i> -	Ø-	i <del>l</del> ye <del>l</del>
Y.Poss-	hair	YO-	ØS-	grab
his hair	he grabbed			

'He pulled him forward and grabbed his hair bun.'

(b) Nch'u beyte~~l~~ghu~~l~~.

nch'u	<i>b</i> -	<i>y</i> -	te <del>l</del> ghu <del>l</del> .
not	BO-	YS-	turn
not	he turned him		

'He could not move him.'

(c) Ch'u ighe katnastan.

ch'u	<i>y</i> -	ghe	kat-	na-	Ø-	stan
and	YO-	by	belly-	ITER-	ØS-	lie
just	by him		he was lying on his belly			

'He was just lying on his belly by him.'

(d) Ggatgge ita~~l~~t'eq' idi~~l~~ti bidu ch'adelhdghichitl'.

ggatgge	<i>y</i> -	Ø-	ta <del>l</del> t'eq'	idi <del>l</del> ti
over	YO-	ØS-	handle.SAO	and.then
he turned him over	and then			

b- idu ch'adelhghichitl'  
 B.Poss- mouth blood poured out  
 blood poured out of his mouth

'When he turned him over, blood poured out of his mouth.'

In (4.44b), the *y*- subject of the verb form refers to a human entity: the son. However, at this point of the narrative, it turns out that the son is dead. The *y*- subject marks the father's suspicion of this, and the following verb forms serve to verify his suspicion. Only in the following sentence does the father believe that his son really is dead.

The *y*- subject in (4.44b) can best be explained by the fact that the son has lost his agency. In (4.44b), the father, from whose viewpoint the story is told, does not know yet that his son is dead; he does know, though, that his son has lost his ability to move. The *y*- subject prefix, marking its referent for low agency, explicitly downgrades a formerly highly agentive, salient and topical referent for loss of at least the first of these features.

This kind of downgrading a human referent is extremely rare. We have seen several examples where a non-human or even inanimate entity is first marked by *y*- subjects, only to be promoted to greater agency by being encoded by unmarked subjects. The opposite is nearly never the case. (4.44d) is one example for this; the only other ones I have encountered are all in the story of the Hunting Dog. A summary of the story can be found in 4.3.2 above.

In various places in this story, we encounter a very interesting way of encoding referents. When we discussed parts of this story for the first time under 4.3.2, the assumption was that the two brothers, being human, would be encoded by unmarked subjects, while the dog would be marked by *y*- subjects. It turned out that this is not true for all of the story, because the dog also is encoded by unmarked subjects after he has proven his value. The really intriguing bit, though, can be seen in (4.45):

(4.45) *y*- subject for human referent (Pete 1989:3)

Bingha ghun ki biydełchih gheli.

b-	ingha	ghun	ki	b-	i-	<i>y</i> -	dełchih
B.Poss-	o.brother	that	again	BO-	to	YS-	scold
	his older brother	that	again		he was		bawling him out

gheli  
really  
really

‘Again, the older brother was really bawling him (the younger brother) out.’

Not only is the dog not encoded by *y*- subjects, but it looks like the older brother is. But why? This time, the explanation cannot be that the older brother is dead or has lost his agency – from the context of the story, he clearly hasn’t. No, the issue is more complicated.

The Dena’ina (in a generic sense) deeply respect their environment. People, animals and plants are treated with great consideration. This is reflected in their stories. Fall (1990:5) notes that the “separation between the ‘natural’ world of animals, plants and other entities and the ‘cultural world of human beings is very narrow.” This means that the helpfulness and respect offered to a fellow human being must likewise be offered to animals etc. Many stories – the Mouse Story as told by Peter Kalifornsky (1991:154-160), the Whistler Story as told by Shem Pete in Fall (1990:10-20), or the story of Quch’ Nushjun as told by Shem Pete – deal with this. Respect towards an animal, as shown in the Mouse story, is rewarded, while disrespectful behavior as in the other two stories is punished.

Not only the lack of respect of the older brother is problematic, but also the fact that he doesn’t want to help the dog. In his monograph about the potlatch and its impact on Northern Athabascan culture, Simeone says about the relevance of helping other people:

“(…), she was told not to follow the ‘strong people, happiness people’, that is people who disregard others, but to stop for the poor and unfortunate; otherwise, she would make a ‘mistake’, meaning she could lose her good fortune. If she ignores them, they may cause her good luck to vanish by thinking about her in a malevolent way.” (Simeone 1995:98)

By Athabascan standards, a person has to do whatever he or she can do to help another person. Unhelpfulness is always frowned upon, and in children, is corrected at once. The behavior of the older brother is, by any Dena’ina standard, just wrong, this is no way to treat an animal. The violation of this principle of treating animals respectfully is so grave in the eyes of the narrator, that the older brother is assigned a *y*- subject. Thus, the older brother pronominally is demoted to a level beneath the dog, or rather, he has lowered himself to this level. The speaker employs *y*- subjects to encode not so much the low agency of the older brother, but rather to mark his own disapproval of the older brother’s behavior. Let us look at how the story continues:

(4.46) *y*- subjects for human referent (Pete 1989:4)

(a) “Ala! Łik’akda ghin ghuda shdiłchihi ghin k’dakaq’ ch’aniyu!” yełni.

ala	Łik’akda	ghin	ghuda					
o.brother	old.dog	that	because					
my older brother	that old dog		because					
sh-	d-	n-	łchihi-	i	ghin			
1SG.O-	QUAL-	2SG.S-	scold-	REL	that			
the one you were bawling me out [about]								
k’-	dakaq’	ch’a-	Ø-	niyu	<i>y</i> -	Ø-	łni	
INDEF.POSS-	door	to-	ØS-	come-	YO-	ØS-	say	
a den	entrance	he	came from		he	said to	him	

‘My older brother, that dog you’ve been bawling me out about has found a den entrance!’ he said to him.’

(b) Yet gheli q’u beł niqanashetıyidaltuk’ gheli ch’u.

yet	gheli	q’u	<i>b</i> -	eł			
there	really	now	BO-	with			
there	really	now		with him			
niqana-	sheł-	<i>y</i> -	idaltuk’	gheli	ch’u		
around.back-	running-	YS-	run	really	and		
he	turned around	running		really	and		

‘And [the older brother] turned around and started running after him. And,’

(c) Beyeshquq’ ch’anashekıdeltesh duq’a.

<i>b</i> -	yeshquq’	ch’anasheł-	<i>y</i> -	deltesh	duq’a
BO-	alongside	running.back.out	YS-	run	sometimes
	alongside of him	he was running back out			sometimes

‘He tried to run alongside of him sometimes.’

(d) Q’u yeqech’u ukela ghun shełendetush.

q’u	yeqech’u	u-	kela	ghun	sheł-	Ø-	endetush
now	thus	B.POSS-	y.brother	this	run-	ØS-	run
now	thus	his	younger brother	this	he	kept on	running

‘But his younger brother just kept on running.’

Again, the older brother is encoded by *y*- subjects. Clearly, there is a ranking between the two brothers that cannot be explained by agency or animacy. Instead, the *y*- marking of the older brother is motivated by the narrator’s disapproval, or in this case, rather by the speaker’s identification and approval of the younger brother, who at once points out that the dog found a bear’s den, and doesn’t even try to get

the credit for this. Possibly the older brother also violates yet another code of behavior: competitiveness is traditionally not encouraged. By trying to get ahead of his younger brother, he is trying to be better and faster than his younger brother. The latter just ignores this and concentrates on running; once more, the actions of the older brother compare unfavorably to the ones of the younger brother.

It would be interesting to see how the older brother is encoded when he behaves the way he should, whether the encoding would switch back to his being referred to by unmarked subject prefixes. However, this does not happen throughout the story, or if it happens, then when he is shoveling snow – with an Areal object. We have seen that Areal referents are lowest on the agency hierarchy, so it is not very surprising that the older brother ranks higher than the area where he is shoveling snow. Thus, we cannot say how the ranking between the two brothers would be encoded if the older brother would act according to Dena’ina values.

He does not only violate the respect towards animals, but two other basic Dena’ina moral principles: He is greedy, and he is stingy. Observe (4.47) and (4.48):

(4.47) greed of the older brother (Pete 1989:5)

(a) Yagheli k’q’eh nlani k’tsen ts’enał’uts’i yus ghu hnink’ełyel. K’kela.

yagheli	k’q’eh	nlani	k’tsen	ts’e-	Ø-	nał’uts’	-i
good	fat	being	meat	off-	ØS-	cut	-REL
good	pieces of fat and meat			he, cutting them off			

yus	ghu	hnin-	k’-	Ø-	ełyel	k’-	kela
fire	there	to.it	INDEF.O-	ØS-	handle.LRO	INDEF.POSS-	y.brother
over the fire		he stuck them to it			the younger brother		

‘Cutting off good pieces of fat and meat, he stuck them [on sticks] over the fire. The younger brother [did that].’

(b) K’q’eh ghu ch’anit’uts’ iteltlet bingha.

k’-	q’eh	ghu	ch’a-	Ø-	nit’uts’
INDEF.POSS-	fat	there	off-	ØS-	cut
its fat		there	he cut off		

y-	Ø-	teltlet	b-	ingha
YO-	ØS-	swallow	B.Poss-	o.brother
he swallowed it		his older brother		

‘The older brother just cut off a chunk of meat and he swallowed it.’

(c) “K’q’eh ch’elqadi dghayi,” yetni.

k’q’eh	ch’-	lqat	-i	dghay	-i
fat	CH’-	eat	NEG.IMP	be.raw	-REL
fat		don’t eat it		it, being raw	
y-	Ø-	ħni			
YO-	ØS-	say			
he said to him					

“Don’t eat fat raw,” [the younger brother] told him.’

Here, the younger brother acts in a good way, preparing the meat so that everybody can eat. His older brother does not care about this and only thinks about getting food for himself. He doesn’t even care that he is eating raw fat, and has to be admonished by his younger brother for this. However, he is not marked by *y*-subjects in this case. Possibly this is because the difference in agency between a piece of meat and a human being is too big to be reversed. Not only would the older brother be marked by *y*- subject, but the object, the piece of meat, would have to be marked by *b*-, indicating that the meat ranks higher than the brother.

The marking in (4.46) thus indicates that the older brother ranks lower than his younger brother. However, this is more of a ranking ‘between equals’, as there is no agency difference between the brothers. Thus, a secondary ranking that reflects the speaker’s attitude towards the referents is made possible. If, on the other hand, there already is a difference in agency between the referents, as in (4.47), *y*- marking of the inherently higher-ranking referent is not possible, as this would completely upset the system. The same can be observed in (4.48), where the behavior of the older brother gets even worse:

(4.48) stinginess of the older brother (Pete 1989:5)

(a) Ħik’akda ghin ch’aydesis ghudehdi yiduydech.

ħik’a	-kda	ghin	ch’a-	y-	Ø-	desis	ghudehdi
dog	-old	that	off-	YO-	ØS-	cut	stuff
that old dog			he cut off a piece				
y-	idu-	y-	Ø-	dech			
YO-	in.mouth	YO-	ØS-	handle.SRO			
he put it into his mouth							

‘He [the younger brother] cut off a chunk for that old dog and put it into his mouth.’

(b) Beyeniŋ'ih ka gheli bingha ghun ighe itnashchit.

<i>b-</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>niŋ'ih</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>gheli</i>	<i>b-</i>	<i>ingha</i>
BO-	YS-	look.at	really	really	B.Poss-	o.brother
he stared at him			really	his older brother		
<i>ghun</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>ghe</i>	<i>Ø-</i>	<i>itnashchit</i>		
this	YO-	for	ØS-	be.stingy		
this	for it		he was stingy			

‘His older brother just stared at him, being stingy for [the meat].’

Sharing is of utmost importance in any Athabascan culture.<sup>20</sup> If one family has great luck with fishing, they will make sure that everybody else in the village gets their fair share. According to Simeone (1995:95), “reciprocity and generosity are the fundamental principles of the Indian way”, and he states later: “Generosity, especially towards the elderly and unfortunate, was a virtue parents wanted to instill in the young.” (Simeone 1995:98) If a person does not share, this reflects badly on him or her (Andrew Balluta, personal communication). Begrudging another person’s food just is not done, and the fact that the older brother doesn’t want to share the meat with the animal that found the bear for them makes it only worse.

The Hunting Dog is a classic example of a lesson story, a story where basic Dena’ina values are explained by the action and not explicitly. The older brother disregards several of these values, and although he is not punished for his behavior, the speaker clearly marks his attitude by using *y-* subjects to refer to him. The younger brother, who throughout the story has acted like he was supposed to, is rewarded by finding the bear (with the dog’s help). Because his actions meet the standards of Dena’ina culture, he is encoded by unmarked subjects.

Thus, another component has been added to the catalogue of functions of *y-* subjects: It may be employed in order to down-grade a referent that is inherently agentive, topical and salient, if that referent does something that makes him “less of a person”. By violating codes of behavior, the older brother in the Hunting Dog willingly abandones being a responsible human being, which is encoded by *y-* subjects.

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that in the following paragraphs, the “ideal” way of things is described. Of course, people today do not share everything they have, and as Simeone (1995:97f.) points out, the sharing has lessened. However, sharing is still a fundamental value of the Dena’ina.

#### 4.6.3 One last example of *y*- subjects

*Y*- subjects abound in the one non-fiction narrative used in this study, the story about training geese by Vonga Bobby of Lime Village.<sup>21</sup> In this story, a family trains geese to watch over the fish racks. When two girls and their mother are alone at the fish racks, a bear comes along. The women do not have any weapon and do not have anywhere to run. But the geese come when called and harrass the bear and ultimately chase it away.

In the first part of the text, both the geese and the bear are always acting on the women, either by living with them, or by walking towards them. Thus, the encoding is in most cases as we would predict; geese and bear are encoded by *y*- subjects, the women by *qub*- objects. In the following examples, the women are co-indexed with W, the geese with G and the bear with B:

(4.49a) geese and women (gee013)<sup>22</sup>

Ndalvayi ghinhdi qevgh yedalts'i.

ndalvayi	ghinhdi	<i>qev<sub>W</sub></i> -	egh	<i>y<sub>G</sub></i> -	dalts'i
geese	these	QBO-	by	YS-	stay
geese	these	by them		they were staying	

'The geese were staying by them.'

(...)

(4.49b) bear and women (gee015)

Ighi it ła gu sht'a gu idiłq'un ggagga łu qevch' gheyuł.

ighi	it ła	gu sht'a	idiłq'un		
and.then	soon	right.there	fire.burns		
and then	soon	right there	fire is burning		
ggagga		łu	<i>qev<sub>W</sub></i> -	ch'	<i>Ø<sub>B</sub></i> - gheyuł
brown.bear	it.is.said	QBO-	to	<i>ØS</i> -	walk
brown bear	it is said	towards them	it was coming		

'And then soon right nearby the fire they kept a brown bear was coming towards them.'

(...)

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Jim Kari for pointing out this text to me long after I had stopped collecting examples for *y*- subjects.

<sup>22</sup> All examples that are labeled like *gee001* are taken from the Geese Story (Bobby 1996). *gee* refers to the name of the story, the number to the utterance.

(4.49c) bear and women (gee020)

Qevech' gheli ghedejax (HD yudejax)<sup>23</sup>.

<i>qev<sub>w</sub>-</i>	ch'	gheli	$\emptyset_B$ -	ghedejax	<i>j<sub>B</sub>-</i>	udejax		
QBO-	to	really	$\emptyset_S$ -	lope	YS-	lope		
towards	them	really	he	was	loping	it	was	loping

'It was loping towards them'

(...)

(4.49d) bear and women (gee29)

Q'u gheli hvaytazyu hnuyu (...)

q'u	gheli	<i>qev<sub>w</sub>-</i>	<i>j<sub>B</sub>-</i>	tazyu	hnuyu			
now	really	QBO-	YS-	start.to.go	when			
now	really	it	had	nearly	come	to	them	when

'It was almost to them when (...)

All examples in (4.49) are taken from the opening section of the Geese story, when the bear just starts running towards them. (4.49a) is only displayed to show that the geese are marked by *j*- subjects if they are acting on the women. More interesting are the following utterances where the bear joins into the action.

The first time the bear is mentioned, it is by an unmarked subject in (4.49b). Because of the full NP in that sentence, the *j*- subject is not necessary for disambiguation. The next time the bear is subject – in (4.49c) – the original speaker (Vonga Bobby) uses again no overt subject marker to refer to the bear. His niece Helen Dick, however, who helped with the translation of the story, preferred the form in parentheses, because of clearer reference. In the final example (4.49d) the speaker uses a *j*- subject to refer to the bear, probably because of the same reasons that motivated Helen Dick to do that in (4.49c): In both cases, the bear has for a long time not been introduced by a full NP (the last NP co-referential to the bear is in gee015, five utterances before (4.49c) and fourteen utterances before (4.49d)), so that disambiguation is necessary.

In the following part of the story, the women do not play a great role. Instead, the geese charge the bear and finally chase it away. Note how this is marked pronominally:

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<sup>23</sup> The parentheses are for a correction made by the niece of the speaker.

(4.50a) geese and bear (gee032)

Yenaqanutjeh duyeh gheli.

$y_B$ -	naqa-	nu-	$\emptyset_G$ -	tjeh	duyeh	gheli
YO-	around-	around-	$\emptyset_S$ -	fly	low	really
they	flew	around			low	really

‘They flew around it way down low.’

(...)

(4.50b) geese and bear (gee034)

Q’u la’a vek’u q’u nuyeltlet.

q’u	la’a	$v_B$ -	k’u	q’u	nu-	$y_G$ -	ltlet
now	one	BO-	opposite	now	down-	YS-	fly
now	one	opposite	it	now	it	landed	

‘So then one landed right opposite it.’

(4.50c) geese and bear (gee037)

Qevyech’ ighi’it hnuyu nijehch’ ch’u gushla veghu nunuyenjehch’.

$qev_B$ -	yech’	ighi’it	hnuyu	$\emptyset_G$ -	nijeh-	ch’	ch’u
QBO-	toward	there	when	$\emptyset_S$ -	fly	-REL	and
toward	them	there	when		they, flying		and
gushla	$v_B$ -	ghu	nu-	nu-	$y_G$ -	njeh-	ch’
a.little.ways	BO-	from	down-	ITER-	YS-	land	REL
a little ways	from	it			they, landing		

‘When they flew toward it, they landed again a little ways from it.’

This stretch of text is particularly interesting, as the encoding of the geese changes according to whether they do something that is typical for geese (e.g. flying or circling around an enemy) or whether they do something unusual – like landing next to a bear, an animal that most certainly counts as an enemy.

In (4.50a), the geese behave normally and thus are encoded by unmarked subjects. In (4.50b), one of the geese directly attacks the bear: Promptly we see a  $y$ -subject co-referential to the goose. In (4.50c), the geese start another attack. The first verb form, *qevyech’* (...) *nijehch’* ‘they flying towards it’<sup>24</sup> describes again a natural action for geese, which triggers unmarked subjects. The second verb form again

<sup>24</sup> I cannot explain the plural object prefix *qev-* in this example. There is only one bear in the story, and the fact that bears rarely fly excludes the possibility that subject reference has changed.

describes an un-geeselike action, which is reflected in the choice of the *y*- subject marker.

In this story, we have seen several uses of *y*- subjects versus unmarked subjects. First of all, the *y*- subject can be used to show the low agentivity of geese in comparison to people. Later on, it is used for reference tracking purposes; the *y*-subject is assigned to the bear because it is so much less agentive than the women it is walking to. When finally the geese and the bear co-occur, the encoding depends on the actions of the geese: if the geese behave like they should, they are referred to by unmarked subjects, in all other cases, by *y*- subject prefixes. Again, this may be explained with agentivity: A goose does not need a high level of agentivity to do what it is supposed to do: flying. In order to chase away a bear, however, it needs a degree of Volition and Control that is not usually present in geese. Just as moving mountains show a degree of Movement that is not usually associated with mountains are marked differently from non-moving ones, so are geese that exercise an untypical amount of control and volition.

#### **4.7 Summary of functions of *y*- subject marking**

In the Dena'ina view of the world, agency, meaning the ability of a certain being to act, and to act towards other beings, plays a great role throughout the language. The basic pattern is that a referent ranking high in agency acts on a referent ranking low in agency. This basic pattern is represented by an unmarked subject and a *y*- object, both for direct and postpositional objects. Any deviation from this pattern has to be marked clearly.

If the subject ranks lower than the direct object, there is only one possibility for the speaker: The low-ranking subject has to be encoded by *y*-, the high-ranking object by *b*-. If, on the other hand, the speaker wants to mark the postpositional object as higher-ranking than the subject, there are two possibilities.

The first possibility is for the subject to be unmarked, and for the postpositional object to be marked by *b*-. This is, as we saw in 4.2.2, always the case if the verb theme is stative intransitive, and thus is expected to require an inanimate or otherwise low-ranking subject. The other possibility is for the subject to be marked by *y*- and for the oblique object to be marked by *b*-. If this happens, the verb theme usually is active and typically selects an agentive referent as a subject. In this case, there is a prototypically low-ranking subject that for some reason has been

promoted to a high agentivity. Thus, we get *b- Ø-* if the constellation of arguments fits the Dena'ina worldview, and *b- y-* if it doesn't.

Although Dena'ina does not have a four person system as some other Athabascan languages, the differentiation between *y-* subjects and unmarked subjects can marginally be used for reference tracking purposes. In some stretches of text, one referent (the lower-ranking one) can be assigned *y-* subjects, while the other referent (the higher-ranking one) is assigned unmarked subjects. However, as *y-* marking is only possible if the verb form has at least one other argument besides the subject, this reference tracking system is not fully developed and is abandoned every time that the lower-ranking referent is subject of an intransitive verb form.

Last of all, the *y-* subject can express the speaker's judgment or disdain towards a particular character within a narrative or other kind of discourse. By using the *y-* subject prefix, it is implied that the referent is lacking important features that actually make him or her human. A *y-* subject prefix referring to a human being takes away the human-ness from that referent. This is a very strong means of encoding disapproval with the behavior of a certain character, and it happens rarely. However, the use of *y-* subject referring to a human being may also indicate that this human being has lost his or her inherent agency: *y-* subjects may be used to refer to a dead person. As there are not many examples for both of the last features of *y-* subjects, however, the results here must remain tentative.

#### 4.8 Syntactic motivation of participant marking

In her discussion of Slave, Navajo and Ahtna, Rice (2000b) is concerned with the question of whether these languages exhibit a formal distinction of unaccusative and unergative verbs. She concludes that this distinction is not present in these languages. One of the motivations for this decision is that even though Ahtna exhibits the same (or at least, a similar) participant marking pattern as Dena'ina, this marking does not correlate with an unaccusative/unergative distinction. She shows that the *y-/b-* construction in Ahtna is permitted both with unaccusatives and with unergatives. See the following examples of Kari (1990), quoted after Rice (2000b:182):<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Interlinear translation added by the author.

(4.51) Ahtna

(a) *b- y-* construction in unaccusatives

ba tayghighel  
b- a ta- y- ghighel  
BO- on- in.water- YS- fall  
on him it fell into the water  
'It fell into the water on him.'

(b) *b- y-* construction with unergatives

U'eł yayaakł.  
b- eł y- ayaał  
BO- with YS- walk  
with him/her s/he walked  
'S/he is walking with him/her.'<sup>26</sup>

The same thing can be observed for Dena'ina. Two examples presented earlier in this chapter will be repeated here, to show that Rice's claim holds true for Dena'ina as well as for Ahtna:

(4.52a) *b- y-* construction with unaccusatives (Pete 1978:6)

Qałnigi ghini dghelay nqubeł yılteł.  
qałnigi ghini dghelay nqub- eł y- ılteł  
rocks those mountain QBO- to YS- plural.O.moves  
those rocks mountain towards them things moved  
'Those rocks, that mountain broke loose towards them.'

(4.2b) *b- y-* construction with unergatives (Pete 1989:3)

Qubeł q'u yuyukł.  
qub- eł q'u y- uyukł  
QBO- with now YS- walk  
with him now it walked  
'It is walking with him/her.'

The Ahtna and Dena'ina examples are quite similar; in fact, the (b)-sentences are actually cognate. We see that in Dena'ina a possible unergative/unaccusative distinction does not correlate with the marking patterns.

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<sup>26</sup> There are not sufficient data available to determine whether this gloss is appropriate. Rice (2000b) treats *y-* subject as a marker of non-salient subjects, while it has been shown in this study of Dena'ina that inherent agentivity is more likely to trigger *y-* marking than lack of salience.

In fact, this holds true for all verbs in Dena'ina. Table 4.1 summarizes the marking patterns found with different verb classes. The classification of verbs is based on their valency. For intransitive verbs, a distinction of unergative vs. unaccusative verbs has been included, as this might have been a likely explanation of this way of patterning. Because of this, the participants in this table will not simply be called 'subject' and 'object', but instead, with transitive and ditransitive verbs, the participants will be called 'agent' and 'patient'.

		S	A	P	OO
intransitive	unergative	∅			
	unaccusative	∅			
bivalent	unergative	∅ <i>y</i>			<i>y/b</i> <i>b</i>
	unaccusative	∅ <i>y</i>			<i>y/b</i> <i>b</i>
transitive			∅ <i>y</i>	<i>y</i> <i>b</i>	
ditransitive			∅ ∅	<i>y</i> <i>y</i>	<i>y</i> <i>b</i>

Table 4.1: Participant marking and argument structure

It follows from Table 4.1 that the syntactic function alone cannot account for the marking. Both in the domain of bivalent, transitive and ditransitive verb forms, two marking patterns are permitted, even though the mapping of semantic roles to syntactic positions is identical.

If we regard intransitive verb forms that do not have a second argument, the single argument is invariably unmarked. This unmarked argument contrasts sufficiently with the marked first or second, indefinite or Areal pronominal prefixes. As the absence of any pronominal prefix indicates that the subject is unmarked third person, this zero is meaningful in the sense of Bybee (1987:27). Thus, it qualifies as an inflectional marker. No difference in marking can be observed between unergative and unaccusative verbs.

This latter observation also holds true for bivalent verbs, that is, verbs that do not have a direct object but a postpositional object. No correlation can be found between the marking patterns and an unaccusative/unergative distinction. However, both unaccusative and unergative bivalent verbs exhibit three possible marking

patterns. Two of these patterns include an unmarked subject; the difference there lies in the marking of the postpositional object, which can be marked by either *y*- and *b*-. The third marking pattern includes a *y*- marked subject. As always with *y*- subjects, the object is *b*- marked.

Transitive verbs may exhibit two marking patterns: unmarked subject with a *y*- marked object, and *y*- marked subject with *b*- marked object. The same is true for ditransitive verbs. Here, the subject is always unmarked, and the direct object is marked by *y*-. The postpositional object, on the other hand, may be marked by either *y*- and *b*-.

We have discussed the criteria that lead to the choice of one marking pattern over the other in this chapter and in the preceding one, and they will not be rehashed here. However, it has to be pointed out that the marking clearly is chosen independent of syntactic factors.

The same, of course, is true if the subject is not unmarked third person, but first and second person instead. We have seen in chapter 3 that first and second person subjects may trigger both *y*- marked and *b*- marked objects. This again cannot be explained by means of syntactic reasons.

Thus, the motivation of the marking patterns must be of semantic or pragmatic nature. The implications of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

## 5 Not pronominals, but qualifiers

The system [of semantic class markers] is extremely complex and subjective. Leer (personal communication) also attempted to make a systematic analysis of it but found it most baffling. This description, therefore, should be regarded as preliminary. (Tenenbaum 1978:145)

In the quote above, Tenenbaum talks about the semantic class system, a certain part of the qualifier zone that occurs in the same ‘slot’ as the gender system but has slightly different functions. In the following discussion, both of these systems will be subsumed under the greater concept of ‘the qualifier zone’, the zone of the verb where, according to Kari (1989) semantic properties of the noun or of the action (in the case of the inceptive, the conative etc.) are mapped onto one or more prefixes.

Before we start with the discussion, I want to point out that Tenenbaum and Leer are right: The system *is* complex, subjective and baffling, and the description presented here remains preliminary.

### 5.1 Getting Started

In the preceding chapters, we have investigated both subject and object/possessor marking. The distribution of the third person object/possessor markers *y-* and *b-*, as well as of their plural counterparts *q-* and *qub-* received special attention, as did the distribution of unmarked and *y-* marked third person subjects. This chapter will be concerned with different questions: The lack of a subject/object distinction with the so-called third person prefixes, the fact that they are neither pronominals nor agreement markers, and a new suggestion as to their function.

We will start with the question of a subject/object distinction (section 5.2). With first and second person subjects, the subject/object distinction is quite clear: Subjects that are first or second person are marked in a different position and by a different morpheme than first or second person objects. This will be shown in section 5.2.2.

The situation changes (see section 5.2.3) when we consider subjects and objects that are not first or second person. It will be shown that a subject/object distinction cannot be maintained for some of the prefixes under discussion. We will consider evidence from metathesis among the prefixes under discussion. In the Athabaskan literature (most recent Kibrik to appear), even in publications dealing with Dena’ina (Kari 1975, Tenenbaum 1978), the distinction of subject and object with third person referents is based in part on positional argumentation; it is

assumed that the subject marker occurs to the right of the object marker. It will be shown here that this is not necessarily true for Dena'ina, and that metathesis alone cannot account for the order of these morphemes.

Directly stemming from this will be the question of what these prefixes are, if they are neither subject nor object markers. A possible solution will be presented in section 5.3. It will be shown that, if the object is not first or second person, the encoding reflects inherent<sup>1</sup> agency and patientivity, not subject- or object status. Thus, the 'third person' prefixes are not pronominal prefixes after all, but are more appropriately considered to be part of the qualifier zone of the verb.

## 5.2 Subject/Object Distinction

### 5.2.1 First and Second Person

The idea of treating first and second person pronominals on the one hand and third person pronominals on the other hand as different categories is not entirely new. Silverstein (1976:117) already points out that 'the traditional 'third person' or Indo-European morphology in some ways parallels these personal pronouns [first and second person] in form; however, its syntactic behavior is entirely different'.

With respect to Athabaskan linguistics, this hypothesis has been most clearly formulated by Rice (2000a). Facts from semantics and morpheme order lead her to the conclusion that first and second person are *person* agreement (in a formal syntactic meaning of the word), while all other pronominal affixes encode *number* and *gender* (note that this terminology is identical to the one used by Silverstein 1976:117).

Some of Rice's (2000a) theoretical discussion is not relevant to us at this point; however, we have seen in Chapter 2 that there are big differences in the behavior of first and second person on the one hand, and third person on the other. These differences will each be briefly discussed.

#### 5.2.1.1 Position

Dena'ina is a highly head-marking language. Thus, both subject and object markers appear on the verb, and there is no case inflection for nouns. Subject and object markers differ sometimes in shape, but mostly, they differ in position: Object markers occur to the left edge of the verb – either in the leftmost position, or at the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that we are discussing semantically/pragmatically inherent agency, and not syntactic agenthood/patienthood.

left boundary of the conjunct complex – while subject markers occur to the right edge of the verb, close to the verb stem. This is illustrated in (5.1):

(5.1) Postpositional object

(a) negh eshchen  
n- egh esh- chen  
2SG.O- to 1SG.S- care.about  
'I love you'

(b) shegh nchen  
sh- egh n- chen  
1SG.O- to 2SG.S- care.about  
'you love me'

(5.2) Direct object

(a) neneʔan  
n- n- esh- ʔan  
2SG.O- QUAL- 1SG.S- look.at  
'I look at you'

(b) shniʔan  
sh- n- n- ʔan  
1SG.O- QUAL- 2SG.S- look.at  
'you look at me'

In both (5.1) and (5.2), the syntactic relations between subject and object are clearly indicated by the position of the morphemes in the verb word: The pronominal prefix closer to the verb stem is interpreted as subject, while the other one is interpreted as object. This mapping of syntactic role with position within the verb word is typical of head-marking languages, as stated by Nichols (1986:61): “The clause relations are marked only by verbal affixes which index person and number and whose ordering indexes the syntactic relations of the noun.”

Thus, one criterion to distinguish subject and object markers is their *position* within the verb word. The examples in (5.1) and (5.2) suggest that this is the case in Dena'ina. Other examples show that it is not quite this simple; we will maintain for the time being that if both subject and object are first or second person, the relative position of the pronominal markers indicates subject or object status, with the subject being marked closer to the stem.

If we consider the absolute position of first and second person pronominals, this is not very surprising, as first person singular subject and second person singular and non-singular subject are both marked in a position to the right edge of the verb, immediately preceding the morpheme complex consisting of voice/valence-marker and verb stem. Remember that the first person plural pronominal *ch'* is marked in the so-called outer subject position, the position immediately following the direct object slot. In an example with both referents first or second person, the object will precede the subject, as shown in the (a)-sentences. The (b)-sentences illustrate that metathesis is not possible:

(5.3) ordering of *ch'* with second person singular objects

(a) Nch'niʔan.

n- ch'- niʔan  
2SG.O- CH'- look.at

'We looked at you.'

(b) \*ch'neniʔan

intended: 'we looked at you'

(5.4) ordering of *ch'* with second person plural objects

(a) Nhch'niʔan.

nh- ch'- niʔan  
2PL.O- CH'- look.at

'We looked at you guys.'

(b) \*ch'nhinʔan

intended: 'we looked at you guys'

Clearly, the ordering of the morphemes sufficiently distinguishes subject and object, if both participants are first or second person. In section 5.2.2, we will see that this is not true if one of arguments is third person.

We will now turn to the question of the form of the morphemes.

#### 5.2.1.2 *Form of the Morphemes*

Not only do first and second person subjects and objects occur in clearly distinguished positions within the verb word, they also differ in form. In some cases, as in the one of the second person singular, the differences between the subject and object form are minimal, but they are always there. Cf. Table 5.1:

	subject	object
first person singular	esh-	sh-
first person plural	ch'-	na-
second person singular	n- ~ i-	n-
second person plural	eh-	nh-

Table 5.1: Subject and object pronominals

We see that in all cases, there are differences between subject and object markers. The first person singular subject marker, for example, contains an underlying vowel. This becomes obvious if an *L-* or *Ĺ-* voice/valence marker follows this subject prefix, as those two trigger deletion of the morpheme-final consonant of the person marker. The vowel remains, and its presence distinguishes first person singular from unmarked third person, as shown in (5.5). In the example, the phonetic forms of the sentences are given to illustrate the difference between them.

(5.5a) first person singular

[ħiq'aʔəlqat]

ħiq'a elqat.

ħiq'a esh- l- qat

fish 1SG.S- VV- eat

'I eat fish.'

(5.5b) unmarked third person

[ħiq'alqat]

ħiq'a lqat

ħiq'a Ø- l- qat

fish Ø- VV- eat

'S/he eats fish.'

The object pronominal *sh-*, on the other hand, does not contain a vowel. This can be seen in contrast to an object pronominal that does contain a vowel. In (5.6), we see two verb forms that differ only with respect to the number of the object pronominal.

(5.6a) Na'eł gheyuł.

na- eł gheyuł  
1PL.O- with walk  
with us s/he is walking  
'S/he is walking with us.'

(5.6b) Sheł gheyuł.

sh- eł gheyuł  
1Sg.O- with walk  
with me s/he is walking  
'S/he is walking with me.'

(5.6c) \*Esheł gheyuł.

(5.6d) \*She'eł gheyuł.

(5.6) shows that a glottal stop is inserted between the pronominal prefix *na-* and the postposition *eł* 'with' ((5.6a)). This does not happen with the first person singular object prefix *sh-*; in fact, (5.6c) and (5.6d) show that epenthesis is allowed neither in front of the consonant nor following it. Thus, the difference between the first person singular subject and object pronominal lies in the presence or absence, respectively, of an underlying vowel.

The subject and object pronominal of the first person plural are not at all similar; objects are marked by *na-*, subjects by *ch'*. We have seen in chapter 2 and in the 5.2.1 above that *ch'* is the only subject marker referring to a speech act participant that occurs in the outer subject position. Considering that in this case, position is not as clear a criterion as it is with the first person singular and second person pronominals, it is not surprising that the subject and object markers of the first person plural differ in form as much as they do.

Nearly identical are the second person singular pronominals; both of them usually occur as *n-*. The only difference that can be found between them is that the second person singular subject pronominal has a vocalic allomorph *i-*, which is not true for the object pronominal (or the possessor marker, for that matter). Observe (5.7):

(5.7) second person singular subject and object prefixes

(a) Nchegh.

n- chegh

2SG.S- cry

‘You are crying.’

(b) K’ilqat.

k’- n- lqat

K’- 2SG.S- eat

‘You are eating something.’

(c) Hq’a nehqetes ch’u t’enh<sup>h</sup>tu<sup>h</sup>i<sup>h</sup>. (Nicolie 1976:4f.)

q-	q’a	n-	h-	q-	tes
AREAL.O-	in.hole	LEX-	down-	QS-	handle.Pl.O
into the hole		they	throw	things	

ch’u	t’-	n-	q-	tu <sup>h</sup> i <sup>h</sup>
and	thus-	2SG.O-	QS-	will.do.to.O
and	they	will	do	this to you

‘They’ll throw dirt in the hole and they’ll do this to you.’

Tenenbaum (1978:60f.) formulates a rule that accounts for the occurrence of the vocalic allomorph in verb forms like (5.7b). This rule excludes the vocalic allomorph for verb forms like (5.7a), where the morpheme does not occur between two consonants. The verb form in (5.7c) meets the phonological conditions of Tenenbaum’s rule, but the rule does not apply, because the vocalic allomorph does not exist for second person singular objects, only for the subject pronominals. Thus, the existence of the vocalic allomorph of the second person singular subject prefix formally distinguishes this pronominal from the second person singular object prefix.

Last of all, let us turn to the second person plural pronominals. Here again, the difference between the prefixes is considerable. The object pronominal has the form *nb-* or *b-*, while the subject prefix has the form *eb-*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Again, the vowel in this prefix can be shown by looking at the paradigm of ‘eat’. The second person plural form again is *elqat* (as was the first person singular whose prefix also contains a vowel). The final *b* of the prefix elides before *L-* and *ʔ-* voice/valence markers.

### 5.2.1.3 First and second person pronominals: subject and object markers

In this section, it was shown that first and second person subject and object prefixes differ significantly with respect to position and form. Table 5.2 illustrates this once more:

Object	Subject	Verbal prefixes	Subject	
<i>sb-</i>			<i>esh-</i>	Verb Stem
<i>na-</i>	<i>cbʰ-</i>	...	<i>n-</i>	
<i>n-</i>			<i>eb-</i>	
<i>nb-</i>				

Table 5.2: Subject and Object Distinction for First and Second Person

Even though the first person plural subject pronominal does not occur in the inner subject position, we have shown in section 5.1.1 that it always follows first or second object pronominals. Thus, if both subject and object are first or second person, the object prefix always precedes the subject marker: The syntactic roles of subject and object are assigned according to the position of the prefixes within the verb word.

Together with the difference in the form of subject and object pronominals, this permits the conclusion that in Dena'ina, first and second person prefixes can actually be categorized into subject and object pronominals. The inventory of subject pronominals contains *esh-* 'first person singular subject', *n-* 'second person singular subject', *cbʰ-* 'first person plural subject' and *eb-* 'second person plural subject'; the inventory of object pronouns consists of *sb-* 'first person singular object', *n-* 'second person singular object', *na-* 'first person plural object', and *nb-* 'second person plural object'.

We have shown here that within the domain of first and second person pronominals, a clear distinction of subject and object markers can be made. We will see in the following sections that this is not true for third person pronominals.

A last thing we should consider in the context with first and second person prefixes is the fact that they are truly pronominal in nature, meaning that they are able to fill the argument positions of a verb. Observe the following pair of sentences:

(5.8) NP adjunction to first person prefix

(a) no adjunct

Tagheshtneq.

tagh- esh tneq  
LEX- 1SG.S- tired

‘I am tired.’

(b) adjoined free pronoun

Shi (shida) tagheshtneq.

shi (shida) tagh- esh- tneq  
1SG (Evid:1) LEX- 1SG.S- tired

‘As for me, I’m tired.’

(c) adjoined NP

\*Olga shida tagheshtneq.

Intended: ‘Being Olga, I’m tired.’

We see that (5.8a) is a perfectly acceptable verb form. The person marker *esh-* sufficiently conveys the meaning of ‘first person singular subject’, so that no additional free nouns and pronouns are necessary to yield a grammatical sentence. (5.8b) shows though that adjunction of a free pronoun is possible, resulting in a topic construction (see Saxon 1986 for a more detailed discussion of these constructions in Dogrib).

Nominal adjunction to a first or second person prefix, however, is not possible, as shown in (5.8c).<sup>3</sup> If we consider first and second person prefixes to be true pronominals with argument status, this is not surprising. The argument slots can be filled by the first and second person prefixes; the utterance is thus syntactically complete. Semantically, a nominal adjunction cannot add to the content, as reference of a first or second person prefix is always clear from the extralinguistic context.

We will assume that first and second person prefixes are true pronominal prefixes. They can satisfy argument positions, and they are case-marked both by form and by their position within the verb form.

In the next section, we will see that this does not hold true for third person prefixes, suggesting that they belong to a different category.

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<sup>3</sup> The same observation has been made by Willie (1991:109f.) for Navajo.

## 5.2.2 Position and form of third person pronominals

### 5.2.2.1 Position

If both subject and object are first or second person, the object always precedes the subject, as we have seen in section 5.1.1. If the object is third person, this does not hold true anymore. Consider first of all examples where the third person object ranks lower than the first or second person subject. We have seen in chapter 3 that in these cases, the object is unmarked. An example is shown in (5.9):

- (5.9) Inłkit!  
i- n- ł- kit  
LEX- 2SG.S- ł- handle.FO  
'Take [the skin]!'

A discussion of whether the unmarked object occurs to the right or to the left of the subject pronominal is rather pointless. Thus, in the majority of cases with a first or second person subject and an unmarked third person object, we cannot decide which of the morphemes precedes the other.

If the third object is marked by *b-* or *qub-*, it occurs to the left of the subject pronominal if the latter is not first person plural. Observe (5.10):

- (5.10) position of *b-* with second person subject (Nicolie 1976:5)  
Qiqubetghilghel.  
qi- qub- t- gh- n- ł- gheł  
down- QBO- IP- FUT- 2SG.S- VV- handle.SAO  
'You will take them down into the hole.'

If the first person plural subject acts on a *b-* marked plural referent<sup>4</sup>, both morpheme orders are permitted without a perceptible change in meaning, as Tenenbaum (1978:75) points out. Compare the following examples:

- (5.11) ordering of *ch'-* and *qub-* (Tenenbaum 1978:75)  
(a) Qevch'izteł.  
qev- ch'- izteł  
QBO- CH'- kick  
'We kicked them.'

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<sup>4</sup> It is not clear whether this also holds true for singular *b-* marked referents. As there are no examples of either construction available to me, this will have to be addressed at a different point in time.

- (b) Ch'hvizteł.  
*cb'*- *qev*- izteł  
 CH'- QBO- kick  
 'We kicked them.'

The same holds true for the human plural marker *q*-<sup>5</sup>

(5.12) ordering of *cb'*- and *q*-

- (a) Chich'qudeł'ish.  
 chi- *cb'*- *q*- deł'ish  
 death- CH'- QO- kill.PL.O  
 'We killed them.'

- (b) T'anch'q'u qech'gheteq.  
 t'anch'q'u *q*- *cb'*- gheteq  
 all QO- CH'- kick  
 'We all kicked them'

(5.13) ordering of *cb'*- and *q*-

- (a) Ch'ehnił'an.  
*cb'*- *q*- neł'an  
 CH'- QO- look.at  
 'We look at them.'

- (b) Quch'enił'an.  
*q*- *cb'*- neł'an  
 QO- CH'- look.at  
 'We look at them.'

The sentences in (5.12) suggest that it might be a lexical feature whether the *q*-marker precedes or follows the first person plural subject prefix *cb'*-. However, the examples in (5.11) clearly show that this is not the case. The speaker uttered both verb forms after each other and claimed to have no preference for either of them. She also could not find a difference in meaning between the verb forms. The different orders seem to coexist.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The claim by Tuttle and Hargus (2004) that *cb'*- always precedes *q*- was made for *Areal q*-, not for human plural.

<sup>6</sup> Kari (p.c.) pointed out that in his opinion, and in more classic Dena'ina, the (a)- forms are *Areal* forms. All of these examples were elicited within the last year, so quite possibly, the language is changing in this respect. This cannot be determined at this time.

Thus, we can claim the following things: If both subject and object are first or second person, the object precedes the subject. If the subject is first person singular or second person singular or plural, the object precedes the subject. If the subject is first person plural and the object *qub-* marked or *q-* marked third person, the order cannot be determined: both morpheme orders are permissible. In these cases, at least, position does not account for the mapping of syntactic roles and pronominal prefixes.

What if the subject is third person? If the subject is unmarked ( $\emptyset$ -marked) third person, we again cannot determine the order of subject and object pronominals. If the subject is *q-* marked and the object is first or second person, the object precedes the subject marker:

(5.14) *q-* object and first or second person subject

Shehghi'an.  
*sb- q- ghi'an*  
 1SG.O- Q- see  
 'They saw me.'

If the subject is *q-* marked and the object is third person, the object always follows the subject, as described by Cook (1996):

(5.15) *q-* subject and *y-* object

Chiqeydaŷyuq.  
*chi- qey- dalyuq*  
 death- QS:YO- kill.SG.O  
 'They killed him.'

Again, a fixed order of subject preceding object or object preceding subject cannot be determined; individual combinations of pronominal prefixes occur in a particular order, but no clear pattern emerges.

Last of all, consider the position of the indefinite object marker *k'* in the following paradigm. It precedes the subject if the latter is either in the inner subject position or if it is *q-*. If the subject is *cb'*, it precedes the *k'*- object.

(5.16)	k'elqat		k'-	<i>esb-</i>	lqat	'I'm eating something'
	k'ilqat		k'-	<i>n-</i>	lqat	'you're eating something'
	k'elqat		k'-		lqat	's/he's eating something'
	ch'k'elqat	<i>ch'-</i>	k'-		lqat	'we're eating something'
	k'elqat		k'-	<i>eb-</i>	lqat	'you guys are eating something'
	k'qelqat		k'-	<i>q-</i>	lqat	'they are eating something'

We have seen in several cases that it is not possible to determine a fixed order of subject and object pronominals in Dena'ina. The template presented in chapter 1 does not accurately describe the data. Tenenbaum (1978:62) suggests that the prefixes *ch'*-, *k'*-, *q<sub>Plural</sub>*- and *q<sub>Areal</sub>*- and *y*- occur in exactly this order, as shown in (17):

$$(5.17) \text{ } ch' - > k' - > q_{Plural} - > q_{Areal} - > y - ^7$$

This solution is a bit problematic. First of all, Tenenbaum talks about the order of the morphemes, but not about the order of the morphemes with respect to their syntactic function. Thus, the position of, say *k'*- does not indicate whether *k'*- is used in subject or object function; if *k'*- always precedes *q<sub>Plural</sub>*-, there is no way of telling whether they kicked something or something kicked them. Secondly, no mention is made of the *b*- and the *qub*- prefixes, which also occur in that complex. A third problem with this analysis is that examples (5.12) and (5.13) directly contradict the order proposed by Tenenbaum, with the human plural marker *q*- preceding the first person plural subject marker *ch'*-.<sup>8</sup>

A subject/object distinction cannot be maintained on grounds of position. We will see now whether the shape of the morphemes can account for this.

#### 5.2.2.2 Shape of third person prefixes

First and second person pronominals differ in shape according to their function as subject or object. Here, we will see that this does not hold true for third person pronouns. Observe Table 5.3 for a short overview:

<sup>7</sup> Here. ">" is to be read as "precedes", not as "outranks" as in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the prefix *ch'*- features in both parts of the discussion. This is due to the ambivalent and ambiguous nature of this prefix, by referring to a discourse participant on the one hand but occurring in the outer subject position on the other hand, or by referring to a human indefinite referent. Thus, the prefix has a foot on both sides of the door, if prefixes can be said to have feet.

	Subject	Object
Plain indefinite	<i>k'</i> -	<i>k'</i> -
Human indefinite <i>cb'</i> -	<i>cb'</i> -	- <sup>9</sup>
Areal	<i>q</i> -	<i>q</i> -
Human plural	<i>q</i> -	<i>q</i> -/ <i>qu</i> -
Human indefinite <i>q</i> -	<i>q</i> -	<i>q</i> -/ <i>qu</i> -
Low agency	<i>y</i> -	<i>y</i> -
High agency	- <sup>10</sup> , <i>q</i> -	<i>b</i> -, <i>qub</i> -

Table 5.3: Form of third person subject and object markers

Table 5.3 shows that at least for the low agency marker *y*-, the plain indefinite *k'*-, and the Areal *q*-, no subject/object distinction is formally marked. The human indefinite marker *cb'*- occurs only in subject function, and there is no corresponding object marker. The high animacy marker *b*-, on the other hand, can only function as object and there is no corresponding subject form. A small difference can be observed with *q*- ‘human plural’ and ‘human indefinite’, where one allomorph of the object marker contains an underlying vowel.

Although all of the morphemes shown in Table 5.3 have been frequently illustrated in this study, we will show here for the low agency marker *y*-, the plain indefinite *k'*- and the Areal *q*- that there really is no formal difference between subject and object function.

(5.18a) *q*- Areal subject (Pete 1996:12)

Ch'u qubeł nuhghiq'uts'.  
 ch'u qubeł nu- q- ghiq'uts'  
 and to.them ITER- AREAL.S- become.cold  
 and to them it got cold again  
 ‘And it got to be fall time on them.’

(5.18b) *q*- Areal object (Pete 1977:24)

Guhqugh yan q'u heł nuhtghelnek.  
 guhqugh yan q'u heł nu- q- tghelnek  
 this only now to.you.PL ITER- AREAL.S- I.will.tell  
 this only now I will tell you guys  
 ‘That’s all I’ll tell you.’

<sup>9</sup> *Cb'*- can only be a subject marker. ‘Indefinite human object’ can only be expressed by the prefix *q*-.

<sup>10</sup> There is no corresponding subject pronominal of *b*-.

(5.19a) *k'*- indefinite subject (Pete 1978:3)

Dna k'ilan.

dna	<i>k'</i> -	ilan
people	INDEF.S-	be

'There were lots of people.'

(5.19b) *k'*- indefinite object

K'ilqat.

<i>k'</i> -	ilqat
INDEF.O-	you.eat

'You are eating.'

(5.20a) *y*- subject (Kalifornsky 1991:146)

"Yaghali," beyekni.

yaghali	<i>b</i> -	<i>y</i> -	kn̩i
good	BO-	YS-	say

'"Good," he said to him.'

(5.20b) *y*- object (ibid.)

("Yaghali nenuntgheshtuh hq'u qyushtghel̩t̩") yekni.

(...)	<i>y</i> -	Ø-	kn̩i
(...)	YO-	ØS-	say

'"Good, I'll help you, but you'll have to pay me," he said to him.'

Examples (5.18) through (5.20) show that there is no formal difference between subject and object for the markers *y*-, *k'*- and Areal *q*-.

Let us now turn to the one prefix marked in this zone of the verb that does exhibit a subject/object distinction: The human plural marker *q*-. In subject function, this marker always has the shape *q*- or the consonantal allomorph *b*-. In object function, both of these allomorphs do occur, but there also exists a form *qu*-.<sup>11</sup> It does not feature particularly often, and the vowel oftentimes only shows as a labialized reflex on the *q*-, but there clearly is a difference between subject and object.

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<sup>11</sup> *Qub*- will be disregarded here, as we have seen in chapter 3 that from its distribution, it has more in common with *b*- than with the object marker *qu*-.

(5.21a) *q-* as subject

Qechegh ~ hchegh

*q-* chegh

QS- cry

‘They cried.’

(5.21b) *q-* as object

Qadaquda’ishnex.

qada- *qu-* da’ishnex

Lex- QO- I.hear

‘I heard them.’

(5.21c) *q-* as object

[h<sup>w</sup>əyətət]

Heyətət.

*q-* *i-* etət

QO- SEM- I.kicked

‘I kicked them.’

To summarize our findings: No subject/object distinction is marked with the prefixes *k’-*, *y-* and Areal *q-*, while both subject and object forms exist for human plural (or human indefinite) *q-*. The other two prefixes discussed here, *cb’-* and *b-*, can only function as subject (*cb’-*) or object (*b-*).

### 5.2.2.3 *The status of third person prefixes*

In the two preceding sections, it was shown that not only does the ordering of the morphemes under discussion not reflect their syntactic functions, but that for some of these morphemes a formal subject/object distinction cannot be made. Two of the prefixes, it turned out, have always subject or object function, so the only problem to be solved with respect to them is the order in which they appear. (We will return to this question in chapter 6.) The rest of these prefixes do not mark subjecthood or objecthood by either position within the verb word nor formally.

Another difference between first and second person prefixes on the one hand and third person prefixes on the other hand is that with the latter group, nominal adjunction is possible. Observe the following examples:

(5.22a) Nominal adjunction with human plural (Pete 1989:3)

Niṭq'ena'ina ghuna t'it̄ nuhuqudghun ch'u tinitqilyu.

<i>niṭq'ena'ina</i>	ghuna	t'it̄	nu-	hu-	q-	udghun
brothers	these	rope	LEX-	REFL.O-	QS-	handle.PL.O
those two brothers	rope	they	tightened	them	around	themselves

ch'u tinitqilyu  
 and set.out.together  
 and they went out together

'Those two brothers tightened their rope belts and they went out together.'

(5.22b) nominal adjunction with *b-* object marker (Pete 2003:167)

Qutsaghi'iy ghini benich' nuch'hnutqani (...)

<i>qutsaghe't'i</i>	ghini	<i>b-</i>	nich'	nuch'hnutqani
seal	this	BO-	behind	1PL.come.back.down
this seal		behind it		we came back down

'We came back down up to the rear end of that seal (...).'

(5.22c) nominal adjunction with Areal (Pete 1977:1)

Q'udi qenaga nch'uk'a hghilet.

q'udi	<i>qenaga</i>	nch'uk'a	q-	hghilet
now	words	not	AREAL.S-	be
now	the words	they are not		

'This story is of another time.'

(5.22d) nominal adjunction to *y-* (Delkittie 1976:61)

Q'uyehdi eseni yiqā ghilgguk ha'.

q'uyehdi	<i>eseni</i>	<i>y-</i>	qa	ghilgguk	ha'
then	cottonwood	YO-	up	go	EMPH
and then	cottonwood	up it		he went	

'And then he climbed a cottonwood.'

Note that in (5.22) there is no example of nominal adjunction to *k'*- 'plain indefinite, unspecified'. Considering the semantics of *k'*- as an indefinite marker, this is only to be expected. Adjunction of a free noun phrase does not result in a meaningful sentence.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A possible exception would be the construction *N k'ilan* 'there was N'. It might be the case, though, that the *k'*- is part of the verb theme rather than an inflectional marker.

Thus, we come to the conclusion that third person prefixes are not pronominals. They are not marked for case, neither by position nor by their shape, (with the exception of *q-* ‘human plural’), and they do not fill the argument positions of verbs.

This raises a problem. If these prefixes are not pronominal arguments, they must be something else. The most likely hypothesis – to treat them as person agreement markers – is ruled out as they do not distinguish subject and object function. Our assumption is that they do mark agreement in the sense of gender agreement, and that they are not part of the pronominal zone but instead part of the qualifier zone. (The exceptions to this, human plural *q-* and the *b-* prefix will be treated separately)

A second issue is closely connected to this problem. If the pronominals do not exhibit case-marking either in form or by position, the syntactic relations must be expressed in a different way; after all, a Dena’ina speaker is capable of correctly interpreting a verb form like *yət̃ni* ‘he said to her’, even if the pronominal prefix *y-* is not marked for subject or object. The marking patterns of Dena’ina will be discussed in chapter 6.

### **5.3 Third person prefixes as qualifiers**

Let us return to the results from the preceding sections, summarized in Table 5.4.

The table illustrates the categorization of prefixes made in the preceding sections. Human indefinite subject *cb’-* will be treated together with first person plural subject *cb’-*, as no difference in their behavior or patterning could be found throughout this study. The same will be done for human indefinite subject and object *q-* and human plural subject and object *q-*. For the rest of the discussion, no distinction will be made there. To keep the table simple, only the subject forms, if existing, will be used. The object marker *b-*, and the markers *y-*, *k’-*, and Areal *q-* that are underspecified with respect to syntactic function, will be given in their only form.

	form	formal distinction	positional distinction
first person singular	<i>esh-</i>	yes	yes
second person singular	<i>n-</i>	yes	yes
second person plural	<i>eh-</i>	yes	yes
first person plural	<i>ch'-</i>	yes	not clearly
human plural	<i>q-</i>	yes	not clearly
high agency	<i>b-</i>	n/a	n/a
plain indefinite	<i>k'-</i>	no	no
Areal	<i>q-</i>	no	no
low agency	<i>y-</i>	no	no

Table 5.4: Categorization of pronominal prefixes

We see in the top of Table 5.4 that the first person singular and the second person prefixes form a natural class where subject and object functions are distinguished both by form and by position. The plain indefinite *k'*-, Areal *q*-, and the *y*- marker (the final three prefixes in Table 5.4) form a second natural class, where subject and object functions are distinguished neither by form nor by position. The third category (the middle of Table 5.4) does not appear to be a natural class; all remaining prefixes have been lumped together there. They have in common that both subject and object functions can be distinguished. In the case of the first person plural and the human plural, the functions can be distinguished formally, but not because of their position. In the case of *b*-, there is no subject function.

The first group, the one consisting of the first person singular and the second person prefixes, will be considered true pronominal prefixes. They are inflectional in nature (to use Bybee's (1987:27) criteria: They are bound, they are obligatory, and their meaning is predictable). They are marked for case (cf. Nichols 1986 for case-marking in a head-marking language, and Kibrik 2006 for case-marking in Athabaskan pronominals), and they can fill the argument positions of a verb. Therefore, no further discussion of them is needed.

The second class, consisting of the *y*- prefix, Areal *q*- and the plain indefinite *k'*-, is of more interest to us. These prefixes are not marked for case, neither formally nor by position. Thus, they do not fill argument positions in the verb; after all, we have seen that pronominal arguments are marked for case.

Just the same, the *y*- marker, Areal *q*- and plain indefinite *k'*- are clearly co-indexed with particular referents. This co-indexing is not based on syntactic

functions, but instead on semantic features. Thus, these prefixes can be considered to be part of the qualifier system of Dena'ina.

According to the verbal template that was displayed in chapter 1, the qualifier zone in Dena'ina contains all prefixes from the thematic prefix *q-* in position 11 to the strongly lexicalized thematic prefixes in position 6. Some of these prefixes – the conative and transitional, as well as the inceptive marker – qualify the action expressed in the verb. Others, especially the gender markers and the semantic class markers<sup>13</sup>, classify the noun (usually the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive one) according to its qualities, similarly as described by Krauss (1968) for Eyak. These gender markers are a small class and, according to Tenenbaum (1978:132ff.), include the prefixes *d-*, *n-*, and *dn-*. It will be shown here that the Areal and the *y-* prefix, and possibly even *k'*-indefinite, are also part of this gender system. If they are considered to be qualifiers, their syntactic behavior as illustrated in chapters 3 and 4, can be explained easily.

In a cross-Athabascan study, Tuttle and Hargus (2004) investigate position and function of the Areal and of the *y-* prefix. They come to the conclusion that historically, these prefixes have been part of the gender system and not of the pronominal system. In some languages, for example Slave, Sekani, Tsuut'ina, and the Apachean languages, the *q-* Areal and the *y-* prefix have moved to the pronominal prefix zone. In other languages, including Dena'ina, they have stayed in the qualifier zone.

We will not discuss in detail the claims made in Tuttle and Hargus (2004), but our data suggest that the categorization of Areal *q-*, *y-*, and possibly even *k'*<sup>14</sup> as a gender prefix instead of a pronominal prefix will help to explain the data we have seen.

A similar suggestion has been made by Rice (2000), who classifies the cognates of the Dena'ina first person plural subject prefix, the human plural prefix, the Areal, the indefinite, and *y-* and *b-* as marking number and gender agreement with referents, rather than marking person (Rice 2000:189, 201, 208). However, there is an important difference between her analysis and the ideas developed here. In her analysis, all of the prefixes are treated as one group, whereas we have shown that this is not appropriate for the Dena'ina data, as they form several subgroups.

<sup>13</sup> Tenenbaum (1978:132ff.) treats the two systems as different. I tend towards the view proposed by Kari (1990) for Ahtna that there is only one system, but that these prefixes may occur strongly lexicalized, so that systematic analysis is made more difficult.

<sup>14</sup> *K'* is not one of the prefixes discussed by Tuttle and Hargus (2004). Evidence for its placement as a gender marker will be presented shortly.

In the next subsection, we will reconsider Tuttle's and Hargus' (2004) considerations about the positioning of *y*- and *q*- in the qualifier zone rather than in the pronominal zone. The same thing will be done for plain indefinite *k*'.

### 5.3.1 *Y*-, *q*- and *k*'- in the qualifier zone

A large part of this chapter has so far been dedicated to discussion of the relative position of the prefixes. Of the three prefixes under consideration here, the positioning of the *y*- is most easy to describe. We have seen that its occurrence is restricted to a very few constellations. It can be co-indexed with the object argument. In this case, there is no overt subject marker. Thus, a discussion of its relative position is futile. In (5.23), we see two examples of *y*- co-indexed with the object argument. To further determine where the *y*- marker occurs, we also indicate the templatic position of the morphemes, according to the template presented in chapter 1. The two question marks (??) below the *y*- prefix indicate that their exact position in the verb word is not certain.

(5.23) relative position of *y*- (An. Evan 1976b:42)

(a) Tuqesi ghini yedghichet ɫu ghun.

tuqesi	ghini	<i>y</i> -	d-	gh-	i-	chet
spear	this	YO-	GEN-	PF-	PF-	handle.SRO
		??-	8-	4-	3-	0
that spear	he	dropped	it			
ɫu	ghun					
it.is.said	that					
'The man dropped the spear.'						

(b) relative position of *y*- (ibid.)

Yiɫyel.			
<i>y</i> -	i-	ɫ-	yel
YO-	CON-	VV-	grab
??-	10-	1-	0
'He grabbed it.'			

The examples in (5.23) show that *y*- occurs towards the left edge of the qualifier zone. Now we have to check which morphemes occur to the left of *y*-. In the corpus used here, there are no examples of a prefix of the qualifier zone preceding *y*-. Therefore, the closest kind of prefix that can occur to the left to *y*- is one of the pronominal zone. In chapter 3 and 4, we saw that only two prefixes of that zone may co-occur with *y*-. *q*- 'human plural' (in which case *y*- is co-indexed with the

object argument) and *b-* ‘agentive object’ (in which case *y-* is co-indexed with the subject argument). The examples in (5.24) show the order in which these morphemes occur:

(5.24a) order of *q-* and *y-* (Al. Evan 1976:21)

Q’anqeydazłqux.  
 q’a- n- q- y- d- z- ł- qux  
 sew- DIST- QS- YO- QUAL- PF- VV- sew  
 17- 14- ??- ??- 8- 4- 1- 0  
 ‘They started sewing it.’

(5.24b) order of *b-* and *y-* (An. Evan 1976b:42)

Tuveyghilł’eq’.  
 tu- v- y- gh- i- ł- t’eq’  
 into.water- BO- YS- PF- PF- VV- handle.SAO  
 17- ??- ??-<sup>15</sup> 4- 3- 1- 0  
 ‘He pulled him in the water.’

The examples in (5.24) show that *y-* occurs to the right of both *q-* ‘human plural’ and *b-* ‘topical object’.<sup>16</sup> This means that there are no pronominal markers occurring to the right of *y-*, which means in its turn that *y-* is marked either at the right edge of the pronominal zone, or at the left edge of the qualifier zone. Taking the semantic evidence into account, we will assume the latter.

Let us now turn to the Areal *q-*. In its distribution, the Areal is not nearly as restricted as the *y-* marker. It may co-occur with all other pronominal prefixes. The examples in (5.25) illustrate the relative position of *q-* with respect to the other prefixes. In (5.25), *q-* is co-indexed with either the subject or the object argument in order to show once more that this co-indexing does not influence the position of this marker.

(5.25a) *q-* with second person singular subject (Nicolie 1976:4)

Qighilłkegh htghilah de’.  
 q- ghilłkegh q- t- gh- n- lah de’  
 AREAL.S- big AREAL.O- IP- FUT- 2SG.S- be EMPH  
 it is large you’ll make it  
 ‘Make it large!’

<sup>15</sup> In the template as proposed by Tenenbaum (1978) and shown in chapter 1, *b-* and *y-* occupy slot 13 and 12, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> The view proposed by Cook (1996) that *y-* originates to the left of the human plural prefix and that they undergo metathesis is not shared here.

(5.25b) *q-* with highly agentive object *b-* (Pete 1977:12)

Qil gheli qudihdi ghashtquni baydalgi beqilchun!  
 qil gheli qudihdi ghashtquni baydalgi b- q- lchun  
 bad really thing sewn bidarka BO- AREAL.S- stink  
 bad really thing sewn bidarka it stunk  
 ‘That newly sewn sealskin boat stunk really bad!’

(5.25c) *q-* with *na-* ‘first person plural object’ (Pete 1975:3)

Nch’uk’a naqitustlagh shit’i!  
 nch’uk’a na- q- tustlagh shit’i  
 not 1PL.O- AREAL.S- will.not.make.disappear EVID:1  
 not we will disappear  
 ‘We won’t disappear!’

(5.25d) *q-* with *ch’-* ‘first person plural subject’ (An. Evan 1976b:47)

“Qiqu ch’ehnu’anni,” yekni lu.  
 qiqu ch’- q- nu’anni  
 for.a.place CH’- AREAL.O- want.to.look  
 for a place let’s look  
 yekni lu  
 he.said.to.him it.is.said  
 he said to him it is said.  
 ‘‘Let’s look for a place,’’ [Raven] said to [the Seal].’

(5.25e) *q-* with *q-* ‘human plural’ (Pete 1996:15)

Kilqa ghuna quqisen.  
 kilqa ghuna qu- q- sen  
 young.men these QO- AREAL.S- not.be  
 young men these there were not  
 ‘There were no young men.’

(5.25f) *q-* with *k’-* ‘plain indefinite’ (Pete 1975:7)

Ni’aq’a chiqet’is ts’u luq’u Susitnu k’qilal.  
 ni’aq’a chiqet’is ch’u luq’u Susitnu  
 after.each.other they.die and all Susitna  
 one after another they are dying off and all Susitna

k'-    q-            lal  
 K'-    AREAL.S-    be  
 something is gone

‘One after another they are dying off and all of Susitna is gone.’

(5.25a) shows that not surprisingly the Areal *q-* occurs to the left of the second person singular subject prefix (remember that this prefix occurs immediately to the left of the voice/valence marker-stem complex). The first verb form, *qighitkegh* ‘it is big’ is also a good example of what Thompson (1993) considers to be the classifying use of the Areal in the discussion of the status of the Areal as a gender marker or as a pronominal prefix.<sup>17</sup>

In all the examples we have seen so far, the object marker *b-* has always occurred to the left of any other prefix of the pronominal zone. This can also be seen in (5.25b), where *b-* co-occurs with the Areal. The Areal also occurs to the right of ‘real’ pronominal prefixes like *na-* ‘first person plural object’ (cf. (5.25c)).

(25d) illustrates that the Areal is marked to the right of *ch'* ‘first person plural subject’. This has also been noted by Tuttle and Hargus (2004).

In the next example (25e), *q-* Areal co-occurs with *q-* ‘human plural’. Again, the Areal occurs to the right of the other prefix.<sup>18</sup> And the same can be seen in (25f), where the Areal follows the plain indefinite marker *k'*.

Thus, the Areal always follows all the pronominal prefixes and *k'*. Therefore, it can be assumed that the *q-* Areal, like the *y-* marker, is positioned in the left area of the qualifier zone.

There is more evidence for the Areal being part of the qualifier complex rather than part of the pronominal zone. In Dena'ina, as in many other languages, any argument position can be filled only by one pronominal (plus, under the circumstances described in chapter 2.2, one full NP). However, if we consider the following examples under the assumption that *q-* Areal is a pronominal prefix, we have more pronominals than we have empty argument positions:

(5.26) more “pronominal prefixes” than argument positions

<sup>17</sup> Actually, the situation is a bit more complicated. In Koyukon, the language primarily discussed by Thompson (1993), the Areal has for a long time been considered to be part of the gender system rather than of the pronominal system; see also Axelrod (2000). Thompson (1993) argues against this hypothesis, saying that the prefix *lm-* has more properties of a pronominal prefix than of gender marker. In the most recent study on this problem by Tuttle and Hargus (2004), the view is taken that the Areal is a gender marker, in Proto-Athabaskan and has become a pronominal prefix in some of the daughter languages, but not in Koyukon.

<sup>18</sup> Bear in mind that only the human plural object marker has the *qu-* allomorph; human plural subject and Areal subject and object all have the form *q-*.

Nch'uk'a beqinłchil beł idinlgguk. (Pete 1989:7)

nch'uk'a      b-      q-      n-      ł-      chil  
not              BO-    AREAL-   2SG.S-   VV-   smell  
you didn't smell it

beł      idinlgguk  
by.it    you.walked  
you passed by it  
'No, you didn't smell it; you passed by it.'

(b) Beł nik'unuch'hnghatqan. (Pete 2003:167)

b-      eł      nik'unu-      ch'-      q-      nghatqan  
BO-    with    LEX-              1PL.S-   AREAL-   move.by.boat  
we started away from the shore

'And we started out away from shore again with [the seal].'

In the first verb form in (5.26a), we see three prefixes that might be considered to be pronominal: the second person singular subject prefix *n-*, the Areal *q-*, and the object marker *b-*. Conceptually, however, there are only two argument slots in a transitive verb like 'smell': The person who smells, and the thing that is smelled. In (5.26a), the person is marked by the second person singular subject prefix *n-*, and the thing smelled by the object marker *b-*. The Areal is part of the verb theme and is not co-indexed with any argument.

The situation in (5.26b) is similar, with the difference that the verb is not transitive but inherently intransitive. The postposition *eł* adds a second argument that is marked by *b-*. However, the intransitive verb form *nik'unuch'hnghatqan* 'we started away from the shore in a boat' does not only contain the first person plural subject prefix *ch'*, but also an Areal. Again, the Areal is not co-indexed with an argument, but is part of the verb theme.

Now observe the following verb form. In the corpus used for this study, there are no verb forms where Areal *q-* and the *y-* prefix co-occur; but one example where this happens is mentioned in Tuttle and Hargus (2004:82). Observe (5.27):

(5.27) Tenenbaum (1978:69), quoted after Tuttle and Hargus (2004:82)

Chulyin gin vich' duqeyedałne'.

chulyin	gin	v-	ich'	du-	q-	y-	dałne'
raven	this	BO-	to	LEX-	AREAL-	YS-	make.mad
Raven	this		it	made	him	mad	

'It (Camprobber) made Raven mad.'

Again, there are two referents, Raven and Camprobber. Camprobber is referred to by a *y-* prefix and Raven, accordingly, by the *b-* object marker. No referent there could be co-indexed with the Areal prefix. The Areal is part of the verb theme 'make mad'. Cf. the following example (the two question marks behind the gloss of the Areal indicates that this prefix cannot be mapped to an argument position of the verb):

(5.28) Kari (n.d.)

Vich' duhdazełne'.

v-	ich'	du-	q-	daz-	esh-	łne'
BO-	PP	LEX-	AREAL??-	LEX-/PF-	1SG.S-	make.mad

'I made him mad.'

Thus, it has been shown that *q-* Areal is not a pronominal prefix but a qualifier. We also have seen (as far as one example can be considered to be proof) that the Areal occurs before the *y-* prefix.<sup>19</sup>

There is one argument that does not support the view that the Areal (and also the *y-* prefix) are qualifiers rather than pronominal prefixes. Aikhenvald points out that in Koyukon, a language that is closely related to Dena'ina, the Areal prefix *hm-* is used to "categorize the S/O argument in terms of its shape" (Aikhenvald 2000:168), whereas in Dena'ina, the Areal may also classify the A argument. The undisputable qualifier prefixes *d-*, *n-* and *dn-* really only classify the S or O argument.

Things are even more complicated with the *y-* prefix, which may categorize the O or the A argument on the one hand, and on the other hand the S argument if and only if there is postpositional object, and never if S is the sole argument of a clause. In (5.29), there are examples of the *d-* gender markers co-indexed with both

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<sup>19</sup> It has been said in chapter 3 and again above, that *y-* cannot co-occur with the Areal. However, that seems to be only true if one of the qualifiers is co-indexed with the subject argument and the other one with the object argument. If the *q-* qualifier is part of the verb theme and thus not co-indexed with any argument, the restriction does not apply.

the S and the O argument, followed by examples of Areal *q-* and the *y-* prefix co-indexed with the A argument in (5.30):

(5.29a) *n-* gender co-indexed with S (Tenenbaum 1978:142)

Naz'un.

n-	z	'un
GEN-	PF-	SRO.lies

‘singular compact object of n gender lies motionless (e.g. a berry)’

(5.29b) *n-* gender co-indexed with O (Tenenbaum 1978:143)

Giga nu'uł.

giga	n-	gh-	'uł
berry	GEN-	PROG-	carry.SRO

‘S/he’s carrying a berry.’

(5.30a) *q-* co-indexed with the A argument (Pete 1975:3)

Nch'uk'a      naqitustlagh      shit'i!

nch'uk'a	na-	q-	tustlagh	shit'i
not	1PL.O-	AREAL.S-	will.make.disappear	EVID:1
not	we will disappear			

‘We won’t disappear!’

(5.30b) *y-* co-indexed with the A argument (Pete 1989:5)

Beyeni'ih (...)

b-	y-	ni'ih
BO-	YS-	look.at

‘It stared at him (...)’

Nominal classification has a tendency to function in the absolutive way, thus to categorize either the S or the O argument according to its shape etc. (Aikhenvald 2000:149). However, this is not an absolute tendency. The Areal marker *q-* and the *y-* prefix must be treated as exceptions to that tendency: The Areal *q-* can categorize any argument of a clause, and the *y-* prefix can categorize any argument but the sole argument of a clause.

Let us turn now to the plain indefinite marker *k'*. This is another one of these prefixes that may be co-indexed with both subject and object arguments, without changing its shape, and without exhibiting a preference for S and O

arguments rather than A arguments. There are reasons to classify this prefix as a true pronominal, for example in the paradigm of ‘eat’, where *kʼ-* fills an argument position. Without the indefinite prefix, the verb form is ungrammatical, even though it should be grammatical according to the rules shown in chapter 3<sup>20</sup>.

(5.31) obligatory overt object

(a) Kʼilqat!

kʼ- n- lqat  
 Kʼ- 2SG.S- eat  
 ‘Eat!’

(b) Hleba nlqat!

hleba n- lqat  
 bread 2SG.S- eat  
 ‘Eat bread!’

(c) \*Nlqat!

Intended: ‘Eat!’

In (5.31), is clearly in complementary distribution with a nominal object argument. If neither *kʼ-* nor the nominal are present, the resulting construction is ungrammatical. However, there are also arguments to consider *kʼ-* a gender prefix rather than a pronominal. First of all, the fact that *kʼ-* is in complementary distribution with full noun phrases does not prove that it is truly pronominal; *y-* is also in complementary distribution with full noun phrases, but we have seen that it is not a pronominal prefix.

In the case of *kʼ-*, the position of the prefix is not entirely clear. Let us reconsider the paradigm of ‘eat’ in example (5.16), here partially repeated as (5.32), where *kʼ-* is marked to the right of the first person plural subject, but to the left of the human plural subject marker *q-*.

(5.32) chʼkʼelqat    *chʼ-*    *kʼ-*                    lqat                    ‘we’re eating something’  
                   kʼqelqat                    *kʼ-*    *q-*    lqat                    ‘they are eating something’

This may have to do with the fact that *q-* human plural is the most mobile of the prefixes we are discussing here – we have seen above that it may occur both preceding and following the *chʼ-* first person plural subject marker (see section 5.2.2.1

<sup>20</sup> In chapter 3, we have seen that first and second person subject prefixes trigger an unmarked object. This is, however, not true for a verb like ‘eat’ that necessarily needs an overt object marker.

for more detail). It may also be that  $k'$  itself is not entirely fixed in its position and that it may occur both in the pronominal zone proper as in the qualifier zone.

There are clear cases of  $k'$ -occurring in a qualifier function. Observe (5.33):

(5.33)  $k'$ - as qualifier (Pete 1989:3)

Unuk'ulyel.  
unu- k'- ulyel  
LEX- K'- be.moving.along  
it was staggering along  
'[The dog] was staggering along.'

Kari (p.c.) points out that the  $k'$ - here is not an indefinite marker, but a qualifier indicating that the referent is doing the action poorly and with difficulties.<sup>21</sup> In the example in (5.33), there is only one referent: the dog. The dog has been introduced into the discourse and is thus both specific and definite.

We have seen in this section that there are good arguments to consider  $q$ - and  $y$ - part of the qualifier system rather than of the pronominals system, as has been done by Tenenbaum (1978). Possibly,  $k'$  also falls into this category, but the evidence is not as clear as it is for Areal  $q$ - and the  $y$ - prefix.

### 5.3.2 More evidence: $y$ -, $q$ - and $k'$ - as possessor prefixes

In the discussion of possessive marking (chapter 2.1.3, 3.3), it was mentioned that the inventory of verbal pronominal prefixes and nominal possessor prefixes was nearly identical. The only formal difference was with the reflexives, where the possessive marker has the shape  $d$ -, while the object marker has the form  $bu$ -.

Apart from that, the inventories are identical in form. The use made of these inventories is different, though. We have seen that for the third person prefixes,  $b$ - is preferred for possessives, while  $y$ - is preferred in both object positions. Areal  $q$ - occurs only rarely as a possessor.  $K$ - oftentimes has possessor functions, but only under certain semantic circumstances. We will see that these facts of possessor marking also lead to the conclusion that the three prefixes under discussion are qualifiers rather than pronominals.

We will start with the rarest of the possessive prefixes, the Areal marker  $q$ -. In my data, it occurs in conjunction with only one noun stem, *dakat* 'door, entrance'. Observe (5.34):

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<sup>21</sup>There seems to be some use of  $k'$ - referring to animal subjects in other texts. In the present corpus, there is only that one example, so the results remain tentative.

(5.34) Possessive Areal *q-* (Pete 2003:165)

Hdakat nubesdelchesh (...)

<i>q-</i>	<i>dakat</i>	nubesdelchesh
AREAL.POSS-	door	I.carried.wood.back
its door		I carried the wood back

‘I dragged the wood up to the doorway (...)’

In my corpus, there are two other tokens of the noun displayed above. No other example of an Areal possessive can be found. On the other hand, the prefix is clearly not lexicalized, as the noun stem *dakat* may appear either without any prefix, as in (5.35a), or with a different possessor prefix, as in (5.35b).

(5.35a) *dakat* without possessor (Pete 1996:15)

“Naghengge gu ggagga dakat ch’anshu (...)”

naghengge	gu	ggagga	<i>dakat</i>	ch’anshu
above.us	there	brown.bear	door	I.came
up there	above us	brown bear	it’s door	I came

“Up above us here I came to a brown bear den (...)”

(5.35b) *dakat* with non-Areal possessor (Pete 1996:9)

Belekena<sup>22</sup> Bel’ dniya ndakat ninidatl’ qach’.”

belekena	Beʃ	dniya	<i>n-</i>	<i>dakat</i>	ninidatl’	qach’
?	Beʃ	they.say	2SG.Poss-	door	they.came	to.it
?	Beʃ	they, saying	your door		they stopped	at it

The ones saying Beʃ have stopped at your door.”

(5.35a) is one of the cases discussed in chapter 2 where the possessor is referred to by an NP that is immediately adjacent to the possessed entity. As a result, the co-referential possessor prefix is left out. In (5.35b), the possessor is a second person singular pronominal. The two examples show that there is nothing unusual in the noun stem *dakat* that can explain why this noun may be inflected for Areal possession while this does not happen to others.

Quite possibly, this is accidental. It turns out that the present corpus does not contain any words referring to, say, parts of houses<sup>23</sup> that occur in a possessor construction. Also, we have said in chapters 3 and 4 that referents referred to by the Areal are usually lacking in agency and control; and the second feature is necessary

<sup>22</sup> This word is not analyzable.

<sup>23</sup> Dwellings usually take the Areal marker.

for possession (cf. Dowty 1991). Perhaps the prototypical lack of control in nouns commonly co-indexed with the Areal is the reason for its rare occurrence as a possessor.

It might also be assumed that *bdakat* (the form inflected for Areal possession) is used if the possessor of the door is not known; but as the form *k'dakat*, containing an indefinite possessor, also exists, this is not likely.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of a door presupposes the existence of a house; thus, the presence or absence of an Areal possessor referring to that house<sup>25</sup> does not add to or deduct from the meaning of the phrase. The Areal prefix in a construction like *bdakat* possibly classifies the door as being an Areal itself, or at least as being part of an Areal noun, but in this case, it does not indicate possession as in the phrase *ndakat* 'your door'. In that example, the second person singular referent possesses the door in the way that she has control over it. The house or the cave do not exercise control over the door. The Areal prefix in that construction (and, in all likelihood, in other constructions like this) serves as a gender marker more than as a pronominal prefix.

We have discussed possessive *y-* in some detail in chapter 3.3.2. It was shown that the default prefix for third person possessor is *b-*, and that *y-* is used only if its referent ranks very low compared to the other referents within the same sentence, or in cases of external possession. It was also mentioned that even these cases of external possession could be considered to have a possessor that ranks low with respect to agency, as the possession of a body part (the only occasion where external possessor marking in Dena'ina is permitted). Thus, *y-* in possessor position primarily indicates that its referent is very low ranking.

The semantic difference between *b-* possessive and *y-* possessive is thus quite simple: *B-* possessor marks the possessor as third person. *Y-* possessive, on the other hand, marks the possessor as third person and at the same time, as low ranking. *B-* expresses a syntactic relation – the one of possessor and possessed entity – while *y-* in the same function expresses the syntactic relation and at the same time classifies its referent as low in agency.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Another suggestion made by Serzisko (p.c.) is that the Areal prefix in *bdakat* is in fact lexicalized yielding a word for 'doorway', as opposed to *dakat* without the Areal prefix meaning 'door'. However, no additional supporting evidence could be found.

<sup>25</sup> Actually, the Areal prefix in (24) is co-indexed with a cave and not with a house, but this does not have any impact on the present argumentation.

<sup>26</sup> *Y-* as a possessor prefix does not indicate that its referent is generally lacking in agentivity. It indicates instead that the degree of possession is not very high, and that thus the amount of control employed is not very high, either.

Let us last of all turn to possessive *k'*. We have said in chapter 2 that possessive *k'* is used whenever the possessor of an entity is either unknown to the speaker or for some reason considered to be irrelevant. A typical example of this would be (5.36b).

(5.36a) possessive *k'*- (elicited)

K'tsen lqat.  
 k'-           tsen   lqat  
 INDEF.POSS   meat   eat  
 meat           s/he eats  
 'S/he is eating meat.'

(5.36b) Possessive *k'*- (Pete 1989:5)

K'q'eh ghu ch'anit'uts' iteltlet, bingha.  
 k'-           q'eh   ghu   ch'anit'uts'   iteltlet  
 INDEF.POSS-   fat   the   cut.off   swallow  
 its fat           then   he cut off   he swallowed it  
 bingha  
 3.older.brother  
 his older brother

'He then cut off a piece of fat and swallowed it, the older brother.'

(5.36a) is a very simple sentence. The possessor marker *k'* indicates that the speaker does not know or care what kind of meat the person is eating. The example in (5.36b) is taken from the story *The Hunting Dog*, where two brothers succeed in killing a bear. Thus, the possessor of the fat in (5.36b), the bear, is introduced into the discourse and thus known to both speaker and listener. Still, the possessive marker *k'* is chosen over *b-* (the one to be expected in such a context). This shows that the bear is not anymore relevant to the discourse; the narrative is concentrating on the brother and his bad behavior with respect to the fat. The bear is not important at all.

It was also said in chapter 2.1.3, that *k'* may participate in what is called 'double possessor constructions', where two possessor prefixes attach to the noun in question. An example of this is (2.20c, here repeated as(5.37)):

(5.37) *k'*- in a double possessor construction

v-	k'-	tsen	-a'
B.POSS-	INDEF.POSS-	meat	POSS.SFX

'his meat = meat of an animal that now belongs to him'<sup>27</sup>

Again, the speaker does not know or care what animal the meat was originally taken from, hence the indefinite marker *k'*-. The original possessor of the meat is being back-grounded; for present purposes, the new possessor of the meat is considered to be more relevant and is thus referred to by a *b*- marker.

An even more obvious case of backgrounding by using an indefinite possessor prefix occurs throughout the story *The Hunting Dog*. One of these examples is displayed in (5.38):

(5.38) *k'*- as possessor (Pete 1989:3)

K'kela ghunen bingha bingha ghunen beyakah yuyul ch'u, (...)

k'-	kela	ghunen	b-	ingha
INDEF.POSS-	y.brother	this	B.POSS-	o.brother
	this younger brother			older brother

b-	ingha	ghunen	b-	yakah	y-	yuyul	ch'u
B.POSS-	o.brother	this	BO-	ahead	YS-	go	and
	this older brother			ahead of him		he was going	and

'As for the younger brother, his older brother was going ahead of him (...)

The referents in (5.38) are two brothers, and naturally, one of them is older and one is younger. In view of the fact that being brothers is a symmetric relationship – if A is B's brother, then B is also A's brother – it might be expected that this relationship is expressed symmetrically by similar possessive prefix.

The opposite is true. In the noun phrase *bingha ghunen*, the younger brother is referred to by *b*- pronominals, which is the usual way of encoding possessors. The older brother, in contrast, is referred to by the *k'*- indefinite marker in the noun phrase *k'kela ghunen*.

*K'*- in this context does not express that the referent of the affix is unknown or not relevant in the present context – after all, the referent of *k'*- in *k'kela* is the agent of this sentence (encoded by the *y*- prefix in the verb form *yuyul*). The older

<sup>27</sup> It is not quite clear why we do not have a possessive suffix in (5.36a) but one in (5.37); this is possibly a dialectal question – (5.36a) is in the Upper Inland dialect, where the possessive suffix occurs much more rarely – or whether it has to do with the double possession. An extensive study of possession of Dena'ina remains to be done.

I am thankful to Gary Holton for checking this construction with speakers for me.

brother is the antagonist of this story, and thus is very relevant to the development of action. This has been discussed in great detail in chapter 4, when we were concerned with the question of why the older brother is being referred to by *y*-marked verb forms instead of unmarked ones. We have seen that the use of *y*-prefixes referring to the older brother, he was classified as being less than human, or at least as being less than his younger brother. The same effect is achieved by the use of *k'*-indefinite prefixes. In this context, the *k'*-possessor prefix does not imply that its referent is unknown or irrelevant, but it indicates instead an additional level of downgrading of its referent.

Thompson (1991:63) notes for Koyukon that the prefix *k'e-* (he writes *k'i-*, but we have mentioned in chapter 2 that the orthography of Koyukon has been changed) is used for inferable information that is unimportant. This is also true for the present Dena'ina example. By virtue of the noun phrase *niq'ena'ina* 'two brothers' in the beginning of the story, the speaker already knows how many brothers there are. In the relational term *kela* 'younger brother', the existence of an older brother is implied. By the use of *k'*-, the lack of importance of the older brother is expressed.

The possessive function of the *k'*-prefix here is minimal. The noun stem *kela* usually requires a possessor prefix, but there are cases where it may occur without one, as in the following example:

(5.39) *kela* without possessor prefix (Pete 1989:4)

Yet łuq'u enqeqiłqan ch'u kela ghun niqaydzal.

yet	łuq'u	enqeqiłqan	ch'u	<i>kela</i>	ghun
there	all	they.shovel.it.away	and	younger.brother	this
there	they	shoveled it all away	and	this younger brother	

niqaydzal

chop.hole.around

he chopped a hole around it

'They shoveled all [the snow] away and the younger brother chopped a hole around it.'

(5.39) shows that the noun stem *kela* may occur without any possessor prefix. If the prefix *k'*- is chosen under such circumstances as in this story, it clearly indicates that its referent is being downgraded to an unusual degree.

Thus, *k'*- in possessor function also has a classifying function: it classifies its referent as being extremely low on an agency hierarchy.

We have shown that the three prefixes *y-*, Areal *q-*, and the plain indefinite *k'* have a classifying function even if they occur in possessor position. They are co-indexed with referents, just like true pronominals are, but no agreement in syntactic features – like for example number or case – can be observed. The only agreement is of the semantic kind; *k'*, Areal *q-* and *y-* are chosen according to the semantic features of the noun they are co-indexed with, just as the ‘established’ qualifier prefixes *d-*, *n-*, and *dn-*.

### 5.3.3 *The status of q- ‘human plural’*

Two times now, we have seen that the ordering of *q-* ‘human plural’ is not as simple as that of the other prefixes. The reasons for this odd pattern are not quite clear, but we will investigate the possible sequences and try to fit it into our model of the Dena’ina verb.

With respect to the first person plural subject prefix *ch'*, the situation is most ambiguous. *Q-* may be marked both preceding or following this prefix, without an apparent difference in meaning. Observe (5.40), already displayed above as (5.13):

(5.40) ordering of *q-* ‘human plural’ and *ch'* ‘first person plural subject’

- (a) Ch’ehneʔan.  
       ch’-   q-     neʔan  
       CH’-  Q-     look.at  
       ‘We look at them.’
- (b) Quch’eneʔan.  
       q-     ch’-   neʔan  
       Q-     CH’-  look.at  
       ‘We look at them.’

According to Tuttle and Hargus (2004:83), the Proto-Athabaskan order of these morphemes is *q- > ch'*. For us, this raises the question of what makes *q-* leave its place to the left of *ch'* and to wander off towards the right. However, let us first have a look at the position of *q-* ‘human plural’ with respect to the other morphemes.

We have seen in the preceding section that *q-* ‘human plural’ occurs to the left of both Areal *q-* and the *y-* prefix. As both of them are assumed to be part of the qualifier zone, this is only to be expected.

We have also seen that *q*- ‘human plural’ appears to the right of the plain indefinite marker *k*’. This not only challenges the claim of Tuttle and Hargus (2004), but also our hypothesis that *k*’ might be part of the qualifier zone. Again, we will have to consider what motivates the movement to the right of the *q*- prefix.

*Q*- ‘human plural’ occurs to the right of the first and second person object prefixes, as shown in (5.41):

(5.41) *q*- ‘human plural’ with first person plural object (Pete 1975:5)

Nutiha dghaslinna nunudefi at naqelas (...)

nutiha	dghaslinna	nunudefi	at	na-	q-	las
two	hundred	airplane	in	1PL.O-	Q-	handle.PL.O
two hundred people in the airplanes				they	put	us

‘They will put two hundred of us in the airplanes (...)’

The first and second person object prefixes always occur at the left edge of the pronominal zone. *q*- ‘human plural’ does not co-occur with the object marker *b*-.

In order to explain these odd patterns, we will first have to remember that the subject/object distinction, minimal as it is for this prefix, does not influence the pattern. *q*- ‘human plural’ is object in both sentences (5.40a) and (5.40b). As a subject marker, it may not co-occur with *cb*’- ‘first person plural subject’, but it may co-occur with the first and second person object markers, with the plain indefinite marker *k*’, the Areal *q*-, and the *y*- prefix. Here, it occurs to the right of the first marker, but to the left of the two other ones. *q*- in object function may not co-occur with either of these prefixes (cf. chapter 3 for more detail). Thus, the question of whether *q*- is in object or subject function does not provide a solution.

Let me give an overview of the distribution patterns of *q*- ‘human plural’. Again, the symbol ‘> X’ means ‘precedes X’, not ‘outranks X’.

(5.42) 1,2 O > *q*<sup>HUM</sup>-  
*q*<sup>HUM</sup>- > *cb*’-  
*cb*’- > *q*<sup>HUM</sup>-  
*q*<sup>HUM</sup>- > *y*-  
*k*’- > *q*<sup>HUM</sup>-  
*q*<sup>HUM</sup>- > *q*<sup>AREAL</sup>-

Thus, *q*- ‘human plural’ follows the first and second person object markers as well as the plain indefinite marker *k*’, and it precedes the (qualifier) prefixes *y*- and Areal *q*-. Its position is undetermined with respect to the first person plural subject prefix *cb*’-.

There is no single order of all these morphemes that does not result in contradictions; if we assume that *q-* occurs in one and only one position within the verb word, we are not able to explain the variation of this prefix with respect to the first person plural subject prefix.

If, on the other hand, we assume that *q-* ‘human plural’ may change position, we can present a tentative order of the morphemes. In that case, we only have to explain why *q-* ‘human plural’ may change position. The proposed order of morphemes is given in (5.43):

(5.43) Order of the outer pronominal prefixes

1,2 O, *b-* >  $q_{Hum-}$  > *ch'-* > *k'-* >  $(q_{Hum-})$  >  $q_{AREAL-}$  > *y-*

The brackets in (5.43) indicate that the human plural prefix *q-* is originated in the position without the brackets but may move under certain circumstances into the position with the brackets.

Tuttle and Hargus (2004:94) use a reformulated version of the Principle of Templatic Attraction (PTA)<sup>28</sup> to explain why the Areal *q-* in a lot of Athabascan languages occurs in the pronominal zone and not in the qualifier zone, where it is historically located. This argumentation can be turned around, though, and the same principle can be used to explain why the *q-* human plural marker can move into the qualifier zone.

According to Tuttle and Hargus (2004), the Areal marker *q-* and the *y-* prefix can in some languages be found in the pronominal zone of the verb word. They historically have moved there because of the formal and functional similarity between these qualifiers and the pronominal affixes – after all, both of them are co-indexed with referents of the verb forms, and *y-* has in many cases been reanalyzed as an object marker, and thus can be considered to be case-marked.

For Dena'ina, the opposite applies. The Areal *q-*, the *y-* marker and indefinite *k'-* are still in the qualifier zone. But because of the PTA, the *q-* human plural marker can optionally be moved to the right, to the right edge of the qualifier zone.

As *q-* ‘human plural’ moves to the same position as Areal *q-*<sup>29</sup>, it is easier to explain why *k'-* precedes this prefix. In my corpus there is only one example of a *k'-* and an Areal *q-* co-occurring, but the fact that Areal *q-* has more qualifier and less

<sup>28</sup> This version of the PTA is formulated in an OT framework. We will instead use a theory-neutral version, expressed by Tuttle and Hargus (2004:71) as “a tendency for phonologically similar elements to gravitate to the same position within the morphological template”.

<sup>29</sup> The ‘floating’ status of *q-* ‘human plural’ occurs in several languages; Kari (1989:435) mentions it for Ahtna, Tuttle and Hargus (2004) for Gwich'in.

pronominal features than *k'*- leads to the suggestion that *q*- occurs more within the qualifier zone than *k'*-, and thus to the right of *k'*-, exactly where human plural *q*- occurs.<sup>30</sup>

The main difference to the scenario described by Tuttle and Hargus (2004) for other languages is that in these languages, the movement of the Areal and the *y*-prefix is permanent and obligatory, while the right-movement of the *q*- human plural marker is optional.<sup>31</sup> Quite possibly, if the language were more vital, *q*- 'human plural' would eventually be marked only in the qualifier zone and thus become a real qualifier, instead of having an intermediate status. This, however, we will never know.

Let me say one more thing about the human plural prefix *q*-. We have seen above that it changes position independent of its occurrence as subject or object marker. We have also seen that even though it does distinguish subject and object form minimally, it does not have argument status. Instead, it marks agreement with the adjoined NP, or stands in an anaphoric relationship to a non-singular NP mentioned previously in the discourse. Even though it might be on the way to become part of the qualifier zone of the Dena'ina verb, it is more of a pronominal prefix than of a qualifier prefix. *q*- 'human plural' is thus a third person anaphor that receives its interpretation from the linguistic context.

#### 5.3.4 *The b-* prefix

Only one prefix in the pronominal zone remains to be discussed here: the *b*- object marker. This prefix has been discussed in great detail in chapter 3, so we will be brief here.

The *b*- prefix may only occur in object function. There is no such thing as a corresponding subject prefix; we have seen that third person subjects are unmarked. Thus, the subject/object distinction is inherent to this prefix.

The positioning of *b*- object is also quite simple. It may co-occur with all overt subject markers except for the human plural marker *q*-, and with all qualifier prefixes. It precedes all of these prefixes; the order (pronominal prefix) > *b*- is never permitted.<sup>32</sup> Thus, *b*- is clearly part of the pronominal zone.

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<sup>30</sup>Kari (p.c.) mentions the form *k'qisen* 'there is none', where the indefinite marker *k'*- precedes the Areal marker *q*-.

<sup>31</sup> It has been mentioned above that none of the speakers could find a meaning difference between forms like *ch'ebnit'an* and *hch'nit'an*, both meaning 'we saw them'.

<sup>32</sup> Remember that this is not true for the plural counterpart of *b*-, *b*-. This prefix may metathesize with the first person plural subject marker *ch*ʔ-. Relevant examples are in (12) and (13). The reasons for this case of metathesis are not quite clear; cf. Tenenbaum (1978:75).

However, *b-* does not have argument functions, as it may (and frequently does) co-occur with free NPs. Thus, it will also be considered to be an anaphoric object prefix.

#### 5.4 Digression: Question markers

One more thing should be considered in this context. Dena'ina has, like other languages, a certain inventory of question words. Some of the question words, like *du*, merely mark a Yes/No question and cannot literally be translated into English, while others correspond to English wh-question words like *who*, *what* or *where*. In (5.44), examples of these words are given for the Nondalton dialect:

(5.44a) *vada* 'who'

Vada din?  
who EVID:2:HUM  
'Who is that?'

(5.44b) *yada* 'what'

Yada di?  
what EVID:2:NON-HUM  
'What is that?'

In the sentences in (5.44), we will concentrate on the first word each: *vada* 'who' and *yada* 'what'.<sup>33</sup> Even though the question words are synchronically not analyzable, it still is interesting that the question word inquiring after non-human referents had an initial *y-*, while the question marker pertaining to people has an initial *v-* (and a *b-* in the Upper Inlet dialect).

Thus, the gender system, or perhaps rather a bigger classificatory system than merely the gender system, permeates significant parts of the Dena'ina language. Just consider the following list:

- nominal plural is restricted to humans
- singular and plural human referents have their own relativizers (*-(n)en* and *-na*, respectively)
- the determinative system distinguishes referents according to proximity, humanness, and plurality (with plurality being only a factor for human referents)
- verbal plural of third person referents is restricted to human referents

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<sup>33</sup> There are other question words in each sentence; the particle *din/di/dit/dina* is an evidentiality marker of the second person ('according to your knowledge'; cf. Holton & Müller 2005) that is commonly used in questions.

- the verbal prefixes classify referents according to their relative animacy and salience
- there are different question words for human and non-human referents

No matter which part of the Dena'ina grammar we look at, we see that the distinction of human and non-human, animate and inanimate referents plays a great role. In Dena'ina, animacy is a more important category than number, because every referent has to be marked for animacy in one way or another, but a referent does not have to be marked for number. Throughout this study, we have been discussing morphemes that occur so persistently that in the literature (Kari 1975, Tenenbaum 1978, Thompson 1996b), they have been considered pronominal prefixes, even though their function is more semantic classification of participants than syntactic participant marking.

Only for first and second person referents, the distinction between human and non-human or salient or non-salient referents does not have to be encoded – for the rather obvious reason that first and second person referents are, as the speaker and the listener of an utterance, human essentially by default.

## 5.5 Summary

In the preceding sections, we have discussed the status of first and person subject and object prefixes as opposed to the third person prefixes. Two things were shown: First and second person prefixes behave fundamentally different than third person prefixes. They are clearly pronominal prefixes that distinguish subject and object function and can fill argument positions of the verb. Also, they are referentially unambiguous, by referring to the speaker or listener of an utterance, respectively.

Third person prefixes do not form a homogenous group. We saw that the *y*-prefix, Areal *q*- and the plain indefinite marker *k'*- are not person prefixes at all, but are part of the qualifier complex. They do not distinguish subject and object function, and they occur within the qualifier zone of the verb, rather than within the pronominal zone. They cannot fill the argument positions of a verb. However, they are co-indexed<sup>34</sup> with the referents of the argument positions and have to match them in semantic features like relative definiteness and relative animacy. Therefore, they are qualifiers rather than pronominal prefixes.

We also had the prefix *q*- 'human plural' that does mark its referents for subject and object function, but may occur close to the qualifier zone, possibly

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<sup>34</sup> We will consider co-indexing patterns in chapter 6.

because of templatic attraction to the qualifier prefix *q-* Areal. It is likely that *q-* 'human plural' is in the process of becoming a qualifier rather than a pronominal prefix.

Only one of the prefixes that are neither first nor second person is clearly a pronominal prefix and not a qualifier: the *b-* marker. *b-* marks its referent always for object (or, preceding a noun stem, for possessor) and does not have a correspondent subject form. Judging from its position within the verb word, it also is clearly a pronominal prefix and not a qualifier; it precedes all other prefixes, including the first person plural marker *cb'*. However, the object marker *b-* is also part of the qualifier system inasmuch as it marks its referent not only as object but also indicates that this referent rates high on the animacy and/or salience scale.

## 6 Remaining issues

In this chapter, three questions will be addressed. First of all, it has emerged in the preceding chapters that the verb template as suggested by Tenenbaum (1978) or by Kari (1975a) has to be modified. In 6.1, we will briefly present an alternative suggestion. In 6.2, we will be concerned with the interpretation of noun phrases if one of the participants is not first or second person or, in different words, if not both subject and object are clearly marked by pronominal prefixes.

In 6.3, finally, we will discuss the movement of the qualifier prefixes *k'*, Areal *q*- and the *y*- marker into the positions of postpositional object and even nominal possessor.

### 6.1 A modified template

#### 6.1.1 *Motivation and principles*

According to Kari (1975:341) and Tenenbaum (1978:34), there are four argument positions within the greater verb word, namely the inner subject position (first person singular and second person singular and plural subjects), the outer (or deictic) subject position (first person plural, indefinite *k'*, Areal *q*-, low-agency *y*-, human plural *q*-), the direct object position (the prefixes just listed plus the first and second person objects and high agency *b*- and *qub*-) and the postpositional object position (with more or less the same inventory as the direct object position).

This approach is problematic insofar as (a) the homonymy between the outer subject position and the direct object position is considerable, (b) the ordering of these prefixes does not correspond to their syntactic function and (c) more than two prefixes may co-occur in these two slots.

It can be assumed, therefore, that these prefixes occupy in fact more than two slots.

We have seen in chapter 5 that some of the prefixes are qualifiers rather than pronominals. Therefore, the prefixes will be grouped according to this function. Furthermore, a clear order both within the qualifier zone as within the pronominal zone could be found. Thus, the approach chosen by Kari (1989) for Ahtna and Navajo will be used here. Kari (1989:425ff.) points out the problems that arise from a pure position class analysis, rather than an analysis that divides the verb into affix zones (each of which contain several affix positions). Within these affix zones, the order of affixes is determined by several principles (Kari 1989:434; note that only

two of these principles will be regarded here): (a) If two morphemes co-occur, they cannot occupy the same position, and (b) prefixes that are adjacent and have similar functions belong to the same affix zone. Affix positions within an affix zone are labeled by capital letters.

### 6.1.2 *The new template*

Some morphemes never do co-occur. All morphemes of the pronominal zone that clearly have only object-marking function are mutually exclusive. Thus, all morphemes in (6.1) can be assumed to appear in the same position.

(6.1)	pronominal prefixes of position A
<i>sb-</i>	‘first person singular object’
<i>n-</i>	‘second person singular object’
<i>na-</i>	‘first person plural object’
<i>nb-</i>	‘second person plural object’
<i>b-</i>	‘high-agency singular object’
<i>qub</i> <sup>1</sup>	‘high-agency plural object’

We have seen in chapter 5 that – apart from postpositional objects – no other verbal prefixes co-indexed with referents may precede the markers in (6.1); hence, they will be assumed to occupy position A in the pronominal affix zone.

In positions B and C of this zone, only one prefix, respectively can be found: The human plural marker *q-* (not distinguished for subject and object function) and the first person plural subject marker *cb'*. Their relative order is ascertained by the fact that they may co-occur, and that usually *q-* precedes *cb'*.<sup>2</sup>

Prefix order in the qualifier zone (or rather, in the part of the qualifier zone that is under discussion here; quite possibly, a more detailed ordering of the remaining qualifiers than done by Tenenbaum 1978 should be undertaken) is similarly clear: The A position of the qualifier zone is occupied by the plain indefinite marker *k'*, while in chapter 5, example (5.27), the relative order of the two prefixes that are certainly part of the qualifier zone was illustrated: Areal *q-* precedes the *y-* prefix.

Table 6.1 shows the relevant sections of the reformulated verbal template of Dena'ina:

<sup>1</sup>Bear in mind that the prefix *qub-* actually may change position. We will assume, however, that it originates in this position.

<sup>2</sup>This is another place where metathesis may take place.

pronominal zone			qualifier zone			
A	B	C	A	B	C	D
<i>sb-</i>	<i>q-</i>	<i>cb'-</i>	<i>k'-</i>	<i>q-</i>	<i>y-</i>	...
<i>n-</i>						
<i>na-</i>						
<i>nb-</i>						
<i>b-</i>						
<i>qub-</i>						

Table 6.1: Revised template of the Dena'ina verb: Pronominals and qualifiers (partially)

In Table 6.1, a version of the Dena'ina template that is in accordance with the results of this study is presented. However, the metathesis we observed in the preceding chapter cannot be explained by this template. Possibly, the templatic order of prefixes is changing. Also, no claims are being made with respect to the other parts of the Dena'ina template, or even to the morphemes of the qualifier zone that have not been discussed here. These issues await further study.

## 6.2 Interpretation of verb forms

In the preceding section, it was shown that the Dena'ina verb template as presented in chapter 1 has to be modified, and a new suggestion for the the templatic order of the prefixes of the pronominal zone and of part of the qualifier zone has been presented.

In the old template, we had three distinct argument positions (apart from the postpositional objects) from right to left: 'inner' subjects, 'outer' subjects, and 'direct objects'. We have seen that this does not match reality, and that a clear distinction of the two positions 'outer subjects' and 'direct objects' can only be made if both referents are first or second person. If this is not the case, position is not a valid indicator of which referent is the agent of the verb form, or which one is the patient.

In this section, we will consider the question of how referents and the so-called 'pronominals', which we have seen to be either anaphors or qualifiers, are mapped, as the templatic order of morphemes does nto account for their syntactic functions. It will be shown that this mapping process is purely semantic and based on assumptions of what a 'natural' situation looks like.

The basic assumption that will recur throughout this section is that it is 'normal' or 'natural' if a high ranking referent is acting on a low ranking referent. The opposite case is strongly marked. Another assumption we will make is that, just as two siblings, even twins, can never be exactly the same age, two referents can

never be of exactly the same rank in any given context. However, the rank of a given referent with respect to another referent may change according to salience and local relevance.

### 6.2.1 *Default cases*

We will begin by discussing the default cases where either a high ranking referent acts on a low ranking referents, or where a high ranking referent acts on another also high ranking referent.

Let us first of all look at intransitive verbs. We have seen in chapter 2 that the lack of a pronominal or qualifier prefix indicates that the referent is unmarked third person. In such cases, the referent is not even marked for (non-human) number. Observe:

#### (6.2) Unmarked third person

- |     |            |     |             |      |                                       |
|-----|------------|-----|-------------|------|---------------------------------------|
| (a) | di'eshchin | di- | <i>esh-</i> | chin | 'I'm hungry'                          |
| (b) | dinchin    | di- | <i>n-</i>   | chin | 'you are hungry'                      |
| (c) | dichin     | di- | Ø-          | chin | 's/he/it/they (e.g. dogs) are hungry' |

(6.2) illustrates the fact that third person is marked by the absence of any pronominal (or qualifier) prefix.

This marking pattern is observed in all intransitive verbs. Note also that the absence of a pronominal prefix may *only* be interpreted as unmarked third person, and not as, say, second person plural or indefinite.

In the domain of transitive verbs, the case is similarly simple if one of the participants is first or second person. We have seen in the preceding chapter that first and second person prefixes are marked for case. Thus, the question of reference is solved even if the other (third person) referent is unmarked. Observe (6.3):

#### (6.3a) First person singular subject > unmarked object

Neʔan.

n-   esh-   ʔan

QUAL- 1SG.S- look.at

'I look at him/her/it/them.'

(6.3b) Unmarked subject > first person singular object

Shniʔan.

sh-            niʔan  
1SG.O-        QUAL/look.at

‘S/he/it/they looked at me.’

Note that any other interpretation like e.g. ‘I looked at you’ in (6.3a) or ‘you looked at me’ in (6.3b) is not possible. If the verb is transitive and one argument position is filled by a (case-marked) first or second person pronominal, the other argument position is by implication co-indexed with an unmarked third person referent. No implication as to the number of the referent of this third person is made. If number is to be marked, human plural *q-* is used instead of an unmarked form. In that case (6.4), only a plural interpretation of the verb form is possible.

(6.4a) Hneʔan.

q-      n-      esh-    ʔan  
QO-    QUAL- 1SG.S- look.at

‘I looked at them.’

(6.4b) Shehniʔan.

sh-      q-      niʔan  
1SG.O-   QS-    see

‘They looked at me.’

One more thing. A Dena’ina speaker knows that a verb like *O+n+L+ʔan* ‘look at’ is transitive. Thus, an interpretation of a sentence like (6.3a) that does not include a direct object, like for example ‘I was looking around’ is not acceptable. The verb theme is transitive, and thus has to have an (third person) object referent, even if this referent is not overtly expressed in the verb form.

A similar pattern applies for bivalent verbs. Observe the forms in (6.5):

(6.5) Interpretation of bivalent verb forms

(a) Sheʔ gheyuʔ.

sh-            eʔ      gheyuʔ  
1SG.O-        with    walk  
with me        he/she/it/they is/are walking

‘S/he/it/they is/are walking with me.’

(b) Beł gheshyuł.

b-	eł	gh-	esh-	yuł
BO-	with	PROG-	1SG.S-	walk
	with him/her/it/them			I'm walking

'I'm walking with him/her/it/them.'

If the postpositional object is first or second person, the marking is just as it was with transitive verbs: the verb form is unmarked for person, resulting in a default third-person interpretation. If the first or second person prefix occurs in subject function, the rule we have seen in chapter 3 applies: Postpositions without an overt postpositional object are disallowed, resulting thus in a *b-* marked postpositional object.

What now if both the subject and the object referent are third person? We have seen in chapter 3 that if the agent ranks higher than the patient, the agent is unmarked and the patient *y-* marked. A form that contains the prefix *y-* and no other pronominal marker is thus interpreted as follows: The *y-* prefix is co-indexed with the lower ranking participant. The higher ranking participant is by default analyzed as the agent of the clause. Observe (6.6):

(6.6) two third-person referents (Nicolie 1976:1)

(a) Ndał k't'eh hdiqun.

ndał	k't'eh	hdiqun
crane	nest	they.found
crane	nest	they found

'They found a crane nest.'

(b) Ugguya baydu.

ugguya	baydu
their.little.one	sit.in.it
their baby	it was sitting in it.

'The baby [crane] was sitting in [the nest].'

(c) Qeshqa utsa'a ghun yech' niduhudalyu ch'u heyighetneq.

qeshqa	utsa'a	ghun	y-	ch'	niduhudalyu
rich.man	his.daughter	that	YO-	for	begged
rich man	his daughter		for it		she begged

ch'u qey- ighetneq  
 and QEY- handle.SAO  
 and they took it

'The rich man's daughter begged for it and they took it.'

(6.6) is a typical case of a high ranking third person referent acting on a low ranking one. In this example, there are two referents: the baby crane (introduced in (6.6b) and the rich man's daughter (introduced in one of the utterances preceding the stretch under discussion). In the third sentence (6.6c), we have a bivalent verb form (*yech' nidubudalyu* 'she begged for it') and a transitive verb form (*beyighetneq* 'they took it'). In both cases, it is quite clear that the baby crane cannot be the agent; if a crane was to do something as un-cranelike begging for a person, the encoding would in all likelihood be a *b-y-* construction. The fact that begging is something usually done by human beings implies that the rich man's daughter is the agent of this verb form. The only other referent, the baby crane, is automatically co-indexed with the *y-* prefix of the postposition.

The situation is similar in the last verb form in (6.6). Here, we have an overt subject marker (remember, in the portmanteau morpheme *qey-* the *q-* is always co-indexed with the agent and the *y-* always with the patient). The only plural referent in this stretch of text is 'they' from (6.6a), the people of the village. The question now is which of the other referents is the patient of this activity, the girl or the baby crane?

From context as well from world knowledge, it is obvious that the crane is being taken away and not the girl. The fact that the speaker did not consider it necessary to disambiguate patient reference in this example clearly points into that direction. Thus, *y-* is by default co-indexed with the lowest referent in the present context, provided of course that this interpretation makes sense in the Dena'ina world view.

In the examples in (6.6), the referents differ quite strongly with respect to their relative agentivity. However, there are cases in which the referents occupy a similar level on the agentivity hierarchy. Consider the stretch of text in (6.7):

(6.7) similarly agentive referents (Delkittie 1976:62)

(a) Nini gun yudeq gheli yetsi ghu dilgguk ch'vala ghin.

nini	gun	yudeq gheli	yetsi	ghu	dilgguk
porcupine	this	up really	its top	there	go.up
this porcupine		up really to the top		there	he went up

ch'vala	ghin
spruce	that
spruce	that

'The porcupine went clear to the top of the spruce.'

(b) Ggagga gin ki vetl'uyeh yudeq gheli yiĵeh.

ggagga	gin	ki	v-	tl'uyeh
brown bear	this	also	BO-	behind
the brown bear	also			behind him

yudeq	gheli	y-	ĵeh
up	really	YO-	slap
up	really		he slapped him

'The brown bear climbed up behind him and slapped him.'

(c) Yiĵeh ch'q'u velaq'a ghu k'yenghuĵghel.

y-	ĵeh	ch'q'u	v-	laq'a	ghu	k'yenghuĵghel
YO-	slap	and	BO-	hand	there	get.full.of.quills
he slapped at him		and	his paw		there	it got full of quills

'He slapped at him and his paw got full of quills.'

In (6.7), there are again two referents, the porcupine and the brown bear. As the porcupine is introduced by a full NP in (6.7a), and as it is the only agentive referent in this utterance, it is by default assigned the agent role in the verb form *yetsi dilgguk* 'he went to the top of it'. In the next utterance the porcupine has to be the patient. Thus, the brown bear is re-introduced into the discourse by a full NP in (6.7b). From the context of the story, it is clear that the bear is behind the porcupine, and not the other way around; the postpositional object *v-* in this utterance is thus co-indexed with the porcupine. A change in agent reference has been triggered by the full NP *ggagga gin*.

From the fact that a bit earlier in the story the porcupine and the brown bear have been having a conversation with each other, it can be inferred that they occupy a similar place on the agentivity hierarchy. If anything, the porcupine ranks higher, as indicated by the use of the demonstrative pronouns: *gun*, the one that co-occurs with porcupine, has the meaning 'singular human, proximate', while *gin*, the one co-occurring with the brown bear, has the meaning 'singular thing, proximate'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, porcupine is slightly more agentive (being associated with human-ness) than the brown bear. However, the brown bear is more salient in this context, as he has just

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 1.3.5 for a full inventory of the demonstratives.

been re-introduced into the narrative by the full NP. Thus, all things failing, relative salience can determine which of two otherwise similarly agentive referents is to be considered more relevant in a particular utterance, and thus to be co-indexed with the agent argument.

Thus, the use of full noun phrases to indicate a change in agency (or subjecthood, as it was called throughout this study) is motivated by the fact that a full NP raises the salience of its referent, and thus makes it more likely that this referent be co-indexed with the agent argument.

We have seen in (6.6) above that it does not matter whether the verb form is transitive or bivalent; the patterning remains the same. The more agentive or more salient referent is co-indexed with the agent argument, while the less agentive one is co-indexed with the other role assigned by the verb or the postposition. Basically, the system is the same for ditransitive verbs. See chapter 3 for a description of marking patterns for ditransitive verbs if all referents are third person.

If there are two participants that are not both first or second person, and if the higher one is acting on the lower one, only one of them is co-indexed with a verbal prefix. If the agent is first or second person, the non-agent referent is not co-indexed with a prefix;<sup>4</sup> if both referents are neither first nor second person, only the non-agent argument is co-indexed with a verbal prefix, and the agent argument is unmarked. Or, if we consider the way verb forms are interpreted: If there is only one verbal prefix that can be co-indexed with an argument in a transitive or bivalent verb, then the higher ranking or more salient referent is acting on the lower ranking or less salient referent, thus resolving possible ambiguities.

### 6.2.2 *Low ranking referents acting on high ranking referents*

Large parts of chapters 3 and 4 were concerned with what the marking looks like if a low ranking referent acts on a high ranking referent. Here, we will consider the way the marking pattern interacts with the view of ‘natural’ situations.

Let us start with cases where the agent argument is first or second person and the patient argument is third person. The animacy hierarchy as suggested by Silverstein (1976) and Creamer (1974) implies that first and second person always rank higher than any third person referents. In chapter 3, it was shown that this holds true for Dena’ina. The co-indexing pattern for such cases is that the low ranking third person referent is co-indexed with a  $\emptyset$ - marker. If the third person

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<sup>4</sup> This holds true only if this is not overridden by other rules, like the one of the avoidance of ‘naked’ postpositions. See chapter 3.

referent ranks higher than the first or second person referent, usually because of extremely high relevance to the discourse or to high salience, the patient argument is co-indexed with the object marker *b-*. In (6.8), both patterns are illustrated:

(6.8a) 1 > 3

Nch'u qada'idishnek.

nch'u qada'idi-      esh-      nek  
not    LEX-/QUAL-    1SG.S- hear

'I can't hear him.'

(6.8b) 3 > 1

Nch'u qadavdishnek.

nch'u qada- v-      di-      esh-      nek  
not    LEX-    BO-    QUAL- 1SG.S- hear

'I can't hear him.'

The default pattern illustrated in (6.8a) exhibits one unmarked argument, while in the marked pattern both referents are co-indexed with prefixes: The agent referent with the first person singular subject pronominal *esh-*, and the patient referent with the *b-* marker.

We have seen that referents co-indexed with Areal *q-*, *k'*- indefinite prefix or the *y-* marker are inherently low in agency. Thus, if one of them has agent function, this is usually a marked case, as it will result in a very low ranking referent acting on a higher ranking one. Again, this is indicated in the marking patterns:

(6.9a) Areal *q-* (Pete 1996:11)

Quht'ana bihtaych'ut ni'deggeneltlit i'un qeyekt'eq'.

quht'ana      *b-*      *q-*                      taych'ut      (...)  
man            BO-    AREAL.S-      make.mad  
the man      it made him mad

'Pretty soon the man got mad, and he jumped up and threw that bear aside (and killed it).'

(6.9b) plain indefinite *k'*- (Pete 2003:168)

Hełch' ch'u q'u yach'u qubek'ełch'ish.

hełch' ch'u q'u yach'u *qub-* *k'* łch'ish.  
evening and then thus QBO- INDEF.S- be.windy  
by evening and then thus something was windy towards them  
'By evening they had gotten wind-exposed.'

(6.9c) *y*- prefix (An. Evan 1976b:42)

Tuveyghit'eq'.

tu- *v-* *y-* ghit'eq'  
water BO- YS- handle.SAO  
he pulled him in the water  
'He pulled him in the water.'

Of the three constructions displayed in (6.9), only the last one occurs regularly, as the difference in agentivity between an Areal or indefinite agent and a human or at least an animate patient is too great to be easily overridden. Note that at least in (6.9a), the prefix co-indexed with the agent is lexicalized; this verb theme never occurs without an Areal marker.

Slightly more common are constructions with bivalent verbs where the agent is co-indexed with an Areal or an indefinite marker or with the *y*- prefix:

(6.10a) bivalent verb with Areal subject (Pete 1989:3)

Nichił ghu k'unde qubeł nituqedinlnen.

nichił ghu k'unde *qub-* eł  
nichił there famine QBO- towards  
nichił there famine for them

nitu- *q-* dinlnen  
LEX- AREAL.S- move  
it struck them

'Famine struck [the people living in] a nichil.'

(6.10b) bivalent verb with indefinite subject (Pete 1977:16)

Qubeł tak'ayqats' hqitni.

<i>qub-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>ta-</i>	<i>ke'</i>	<i>ayqats'</i>	<i>hqitni</i>
QBO-	to	water-	INDEF.S-	drop.ECO	they.thought
towards	them	water is going to	get in		they thought

“They are going to sink,” they thought.’

(6.10c) bivalent verb with *y-* subject (Pete 1989:3)

Qubeł q'u yuyul.

<i>qub-</i>	<i>eł</i>	<i>q'u</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>yuyul</i>
QBO-	with	now	YS-	walk
with them	now	he was	walking	

‘Now he was walking with them.’

There are no examples in my corpus of ditransitive verbs with Areal, indefinite or *y-* marked agents. Also, it is not possible to have a zero-marked agent acting on a *b-* marked patient (cf. chapter 3).

We have seen the co-indexing patterns at work from the speaker’s point of view: How to encode referents as to indicate who is doing what to whom? Let us now have a look at them from the other, the listener’s point of view: how are the verb forms interpreted?

If both agent and patient, or agent and whatever role happens to be encoded by the postpositional object, are first or second person, the interpretation is clear; the prefix in the subject position and with the subject form will be interpreted as subject and the other one as object. But let us have a look at other constellations.

(6.11) first or second person pronominal and unmarked third person

(a) Neł'an.

<i>n-</i>	<i>esh-</i>	<i>ł'an</i>
LEX-	1SG.S-	look.at

‘I look at him/her/it/them.’

(b) “Chida kuya gu nushiltan shit'i,” yełni. (Nicolie 1976:3f.)

<i>chida</i>	<i>kuya</i>	<i>gu</i>	<i>nu-</i>	<i>sh-</i>	<i>iltan</i>
old.lady	granddaughter	here	back-	1SG.O-	handle.SAO
the old lady’s	granddaughter	here	she brought me	back	

shit'i	yɛɫni
EVID:1	3.say
EVID:1	it said to them

“The old lady’s granddaughter brought me back here,” it said to them.’

We have said above that the verb theme *O+n+L+'an* ‘look at O’ is transitive. Thus, the verb form in (6.11a) can only be interpreted as in the indicated gloss, as *esh-* is clearly a subject marker. (6.11b) is a similar case: *Sb-* is just as clearly an object prefix. No overt prefix is necessary to indicate that the agent of the verb form is co-referent with the NP *tsida kɛya* ‘the old lady’s granddaughter’.

What if neither referent is first or second person? In the examples in (6.12), there is again only one overt prefix that can be co-indexed with one of the referents.

(6.12a) two third person referents

Husaghiɽey gin “Aa’,” yɛɫni ɫu. (An. Evan 1976b:47)

husaghiɽey	gin	aa’	y-	ɫni	ɫu
seal	this	yes	YO-	say	it.is.said
seal	the	yes	he	said to him	it is said

(i) ‘The seal said to him, “Yes.”’

(ii) \*‘He said to the Seal, “Yes.”’

(6.12b) Ch’q’u yeh nik’ghilggat. (An. Evan 1976b:50)

ch’q’u	yeh	ni-	k’-	ghilggat
and	there	LEX-	INDEF.O-	handle.LRO
and	there	he	stuck it into the	ground

(i) ‘And then he stuck it [the stick] there in the ground.’

(ii) \*‘And then something stuck him there into the ground.’

(6.12c) unmarked subject, Areal object (Pete 1989:4)

Qech’et kda.

q-	ch’et	kda
AREAL.O-	scratch	weakly
it was scratching		weakly

(i) ‘It was scratching the area weakly.’

(ii) \*‘The area was scratching him weakly.’

(6.12d)Nicolie (1976:3)

“Tsughelt’eq’,” qełni.

tsughelt’eq’    *q-*    łni  
I.ate.up        QO-    say  
I ate it up     she told them

- (i)     “I ate it up,” she told them.’  
(ii)    \*“I ate it up.” they told her.’

In all verb forms in (6.12), only one participant is overtly represented, even though all of the verb themes are transitive. All of the markers, *y-*, indefinite *k’-*, Areal *q-* and human plural *q-*, indicate that their referent is low in agentivity. The lack of an overt marker for the other referent indicates that the situation is a ‘natural’ one – a higher ranking referent, not co-indexed with any overt marker, is the agent of the verb form, while the lower ranking referent, co-indexed with the *y-* prefix, indefinite *k’-* or Areal *q-*, respectively, is interpreted as the patient, resulting in the (i)-glosses. The (ii)-glosses are not acceptable for the verb forms in (6.12).

The same claims hold true for bivalent verbs with only the modification that the referent of the postpositional object may be co-indexed with *b-* as well as *y-*.<sup>5</sup> In (6.13), examples parallel to the ones in (6.12) are displayed:<sup>6</sup>

(6.13a)*y-* as postpositional object (An. Evan 1976b:47)

Yeł qenax, yeł qenax.

<i>y-</i>	eł	qenax	<i>y-</i>	eł	qenax <sup>7</sup>
YO-	with	3.talk	YO-	with	talk
with him		he was talking	with him		he was talking

‘He kept talking with him.’

(6.13b)*b-* as postpositional object (Al. Evan 1976:20)

Veyes va itighulnexch’ dyiluq.

veyes	<i>v-</i>	a	itighulnex	-ch’	dyiluq
skin	BO-	on	will.put.it	-REL	fix
skin	on it		so as to put it		he fixed it

He had the frame all ready to put the skin on.

<sup>5</sup> This has been discussed in chapter 3.2.

<sup>6</sup> In the present corpus, there are no examples of indefinite *k’-* as postpositional object, so no example for this will be shown.

<sup>7</sup> The *q-* prefix in the verb form *qenax* is the thematic *q-* prefix mentioned in chapter 1, not an Areal or human plural marker.

(6.13c) Areal *q-* as postpositional object (Pete 1975:5)

Huda Belgansina ghuna hch'anidatl' ch'u sh'aq'a yeh tihdaḵi lagi.

huda	Belgansina	ghuna	q-	ch'anidatl'
from.where	Americans	these	AREAL.O-	come.from
from where	the Americans			where they have come from

ch'u	sh'aq'a	yeh	tihdaḵi	lagi
and	after.me	there	2PL.go.there	NEG.IMP
and	after me	don't go there		

'After I'm gone, don't go where the Americans have come from.'

(6.13d) human plural *q-* as postpositional object (Pete 1977:4)

Nik'eldes dghu hqugh nintudzuḷ dghu hech' h'ulni.

nik'eldes	dghu hqugh	nintudzuḷ	dghu
arrow.shoots	as.far.as	went.to	there
as far as an arrow shoots		he got to	until

<i>q-</i>	ch'	h'ulni
QO-	of	afraid
of them		he was afraid

'Until he got out of arrow range he was afraid of them.'

We have looked so far at constellations with transitive or bivalent verbs where only one participant is co-indexed with an overt marker. These constellations fall into one of two groups: if the only overt marker is a first or second person subject pronominal prefix, there is an implicit, unmarked third person object. If, on the other hand, there is either a first or second person object prefix, or an Areal, a *k'*-indefinite or a *y-* prefix, these prefixes are interpreted to be co-indexed with the patient (or the appropriate semantic role of the postpositional object). The agent is not co-indexed with any overt marker.

Thus, in situations that are considered 'natural' by a typical Dena'ina speaker, or in constellations where at least one of the participants is first or second person, the co-indexing patterns are very clear. If one of the participants is first or second person, then the according pronominal prefix will be marked for case and thus for semantic role. The referent that is not co-indexed with a prefix will by default be assigned the remaining role.

Let us now look at situations where both agent and patient or recipient<sup>8</sup> are co-indexed with pronominal or qualifier prefixes. In most of these, the agent will be the lower-ranking of the two. In two cases however, both of them containing the human plural marker *q-*, the agent is the higher-ranking one. We will start with those cases.

First of all, we have to consider the portmanteau *qey-*. *Qey-* is oftentimes (e.g. Cook 1996, Jung 1999) thought to be a portmanteau morpheme that came into being by metathesis of the sequence of Proto-Athabascan *\*y- Ge-*, resulting in *\*Gey-*. We have seen in the preceding chapter, though, that at least for Dena'ina it is not necessary to assume that any metathesis has taken place, as human plural *q-* is part of the pronominal zone and thus always precedes the qualifier prefix *y-* (see also Tuttle and Hargus 2004 for their analysis).

Be that as it may, the consensus is that two referents are co-indexed by the complex morpheme *qey-*, and also that *qey-* may occur in the verbal pronominal zone as well as in the position of the postpositional object or even as possessor prefix. All of these uses are illustrated in (6.14). As this is a rather complex sentence, the prefixes will be co-indexed: *Rav* for Raven, *Wife* for his wife, and *Boat* for the boaters (the people that steal his wife).

(6.14) the use of *qey-* (Al. Evan 1976:18)

Ey gu qeył qenax łu nt'i idi eła qey'u ghun hyegh hyiyleł ch'łuq'u  
daqeyghit'eq.

ey gu	<i>qey</i> <sup>Boat,Rav-</sup>	eł	qenax	łu	nt'i	idi eła
there	QS:YO-	with	talk	it.is.said	well	and.then
there	they with him		were talking	it is said	well	and then
<i>qey</i> <sup>Boat,Rav-</sup>	'u	ghun	<i>qey</i> <sup>Boat,Rav-</sup>	egh	<i>qey</i> <sup>Boat,Wife-</sup>	iyel
QS:YO-	wife	that.one	QS:YO-	from	QS:YO-	grab
his wife		that one	they from him		they grabbed her	
ch'łuq'u	da-	<i>qey</i> <sup>Boat,Wife-</sup>	ghit'eq			
and	into-	QS:YO-	handle.SAO			
and	they	threw her into their boat				

While they were talking with [Raven], they grabbed his wife and threw her in their boat.

<sup>8</sup> “Recipient” will be used here instead “the role assigned by the postposition”, even if its role is not recipient but comitative or something else. However, the whole list of the roles assigned by postpositions is rather too long to write down every time, and so “recipient” will be used to shorten this.

Example (6.14) contains three referents: Raven (singular), his wife (singular), and some boaters that subsequently steal the wife (plural). In all verb forms and also in the nominal form *qey'u* ‘they his wife’, the *q-* part of the portmanteau has to be co-indexed with the boaters, while the *y-* may be co-indexed with Raven (*byegb* ‘they from him’) or with his wife (*byityet* ‘they threw her’). Examples (6.12d) and (6.13d) above have shown that if *q-* ‘human plural’ occurs as the only prefix, it has to be interpreted as patient or recipient, but never as the agent of a transitive or bivalent verb form.

In chapter 2, it was shown that there may be two human plural referents within the same verb form. In those cases, both of them are co-indexed with *q-*. We have seen in chapter 5 that the object form of *q-* ‘human plural’ is oftentimes labialized. But sometimes, neither of them is labialized, so that either one could be interpreted as agent (the two question marks in the morpheme gloss indicate that their function is not obvious):

(6.15) *q-* ‘human plural’

Qehghi’an.

q-      q-      ghi’an  
Q??-   Q??-   saw

‘They saw them.’

However, this is not very problematic, as in examples like this one the semantic features of agent and patient are identical: both are [+plural] and [+human]. Thus, it is irrelevant whether the left *q-* is co-indexed with the agent or whether it is co-indexed with the patient: The interpretation stays the same.<sup>9</sup>

In all other cases where both referents are neither first nor second person, but still co-indexed with a prefix each, the agent ranks significantly lower than the patient. Examples for these constellations have been extensively discussed in chapters 3 and 4, so there is no point in rehashing them here. All of them have in common that the patient or recipient has to be marked by *b-*, which is a true non-agent marker and can never be used to mark agents. The other prefix is thus by default co-indexed with the agent.

Even though the Areal *q-*, the *y-* prefix and indefinite *k’-* are not pronominals and cannot fill syntactic positions like subject or object, they are co-indexed with the

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<sup>9</sup> This solution is not theoretically satisfying. However, I would like to point out that it is also very rare; usually *qey-* is used to encode situations where both agent and patient or recipient are [+human] and [+plural].

NPs that fill the argument positions<sup>10</sup>. Thus, referents are not only classified with respect to their definiteness, agentivity or number, but this co-indexing also assists with the interpretation of complex verb forms.

### 6.3 Postpositional and possessive markers

One more question remains: If the Areal *q-*, the *y-* prefix and the indefinite marker *kʔ* are gender markers after all, and not pronominals as has been supposed up to now, how do we explain that they may be used in verbal positions where they cannot be part of the qualifier zone, like as postpositional objects and as possessor prefixes?

Well, it is not completely unheard of. There is another prefix that is undisputably part of the gender system and that may also be used as postpositional object or as possessor marker. This prefix will be discussed in this section.

#### 6.3.1 Reflexive *d-*

In chapter 2, it was said that there are two reflexive markers, *bu-* and *d-*. The *d-* element is in fact part of the gender system (see Tenenbaum 1978:154f.), and thus occurs in what she terms position 8 in the verb word.

In Navajo, the cognate of this Proto-Athabascan *\*də-* prefix is part of the discontinuous reflexivity marker *'á- di-*.

(6.16a) Navajo reflexive direct object (Faltz 1995:372)

ná'ádinishtał  
 ná- 'á- d- nishtał  
 LEX- REFL- REFL- QUAL/1SG.S/kick  
 'I'm giving myself a kicking'

(6.16b) Navajo reflexive postpositional object (Faltz 1995:374)

Ádá áyiilyaa.  
 ád- á áyiilyaa  
 REFL- for make.O  
 for himself he made it  
 'He made it for himself.'

<sup>10</sup> As suggested in Saxon (1986) for Dogrib, it is assumed here that empty NPs can also fill argument positions.

(6.16c) Navajo reflexive possessor prefix (Faltz 1995:374)<sup>11</sup>

Áwoo' hayoot'á.

á-	woo'	hayoot'á
REFL.POSS-	tooth	3pull.out
his own tooth		he pulled out

'He pulled out his own tooth.'

If the verb is transitive and the patient of the verb form identical to the agent, the position of the pronominal direct object stays empty. If the postpositional object of a verb is identical to the agent, or if this is true for the possessor, the complex reflexive marker 'á- *di-* appears in the appropriate position: in front of the postposition or in front of the noun.

With two small modifications, the same is true for Dena'ina. Remember that in chapter 2, we pointed out that there are two reflexive markers: *hu-* for direct objects and for postpositional objects, and *d-* for what Tenenbaum (1978:84) terms 'indirect reflexive indirect object'. The difference between reflexive postpositional object and the indirect reflexive postpositional object seems to be that in the latter case, the postpositional object is rather part of the verb theme than a real object. Compare the following examples:

(6.17) *hu-* reflexive (Tenenbaum 1978:84)

huł	nugheltał
hu-	eł nugheltał
REFL.O-	with take.SAO
with himself	he takes her along

'he takes her along with himself'

(6.18) *d-* indirect reflexive (ibid.)

(a) duqu tsatdalen

d-	uqu	tsatdalen
REFL.O-	for	throw.SRO
at himself		he threw a single round object

'he threw a single round object at himself'

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<sup>11</sup> The reflexive possessor prefix in Navajo appears often as *á-* instead of the *ád-* (Faltz 1995:374).

- (b) dich'a daniltuł  
 d-            ich'a    daniltuł  
 REFL.O-     out     2step.out  
 out of yourself     you step  
 'take off your boots (= *lit.* step out of yourself)'

At the moment, the distinction between the two reflexives in Dena'ina is not perfectly understood. Suffice it for the time being that the Proto-Athabascan \**d-* reflexive marker may occur in the function of a postpositional object in Dena'ina.

With respect to possessor prefixes, *d-* is in fact the only reflexive possessive marker in Dena'ina; the *hu-* prefix that is used for direct objects and some postpositional objects is not an option in this context. Compare (6.19):

(6.19) Reflexive possessor *d-* (Pete 1996:4)

- Dey'a hu yeqit'.  
 d-            ey'a    hu            yeqit'  
 REFL.POSS- son    it.is.said    pat  
 his own son            it is said     he patted  
 'He patted his son.'

If the patient is co-referential with the agent, the reflexive marker *hu-* is used, as was described in chapter 2. It must be pointed out, though, that in some of these cases, an additional gender prefix *d-* occurs. In yet other cases, *d-* alone is used to convey reflexive meaning. Cf. (6.20):

(6.20a) reflexive *hu-* and reflexive *d-* (Tenenbaum 1978:155)

- nhudelgheł  
 n-    hu-            d-    esh-    lgheł  
 LEX- REFL.O-     REFL- 1SG.S- move.O  
 'I keep myself moving'

(6.20b) reflexive *d-* (ibid.)

- niqadalghel  
 niqa-            d-            alghel  
 around-        REFL.O-     move.O  
 'he turned'

As Tenenbaum (*ibid.*) points out, the voice-/valence-marker undergoes voicing even if the reflexive pronominal *hu-* is not present, which according to Kibrik 1996 happens in reflexive constructions in all Athabascan languages, even in those – like Navajo – that do not have the reflexive marker *hu-* but only the *d-* marker.

In the preceding section, we have seen that there undisputably is a path that allows the qualifiers like reflexive *d-* to also function as postpositional object and as possessor. Thus, it is less surprising that the three prefixes originally under discussion – *k'*- plain indefinite, Areal *q-* and the *y-* prefix – also went the same path, so that they may function as postpositional objects and possessor prefixes.

### 6.3.2 *Movement to postpositional and possessor position*

If the prefixes in question occur outside of the qualifier zone, they retain their classifying function; *k'*- still classifies the referent it is co-indexed with as [-definite], *q-* as [+ abstract] or [+areal], and *y-* as [-agentive]. But additionally, they are assigned semantic and syntactic roles by the postposition or by the possessed noun. Thus, in the positions of postpositional object and nominal possessor, these prefixes are case-marked (remember that we have made the claim that they are not case-marked when they are co-indexed with the patient referent).

This leads to the conclusion that, say, *q-* as a Areal qualifier prefix and *q-* as an Areal postpositional object are not the same thing after all (despite what was said in chapter 2 in the more traditional description of the pronominal system of Dena'ina). Areal *q-* as a postpositional object is exactly that – syntactically the object of a postposition, with the semantic role that this postposition assigns. The same is true if this *q-* is a nominal possessor. In both cases, *q-* behaves like a pronominal. If the Areal prefix *q-* occurs in the qualifier zone (or as 'direct' object, as is the traditional view of e.g. Tenenbaum 1978), it does not behave like a pronominal, as was amply shown in chapter 5. Instead, it behaves like a true qualifier, classifying a noun according to its inherent qualities.

Consequently, Thompson's (1993) first reason for not considering the Koyukon Areal prefix *hm-* is not to the point when applied to Dena'ina:

One fact which points to *hm-* being an agreement prefix is that, unlike the gender prefixes, it can regularly be used as an indirect or oblique object prefix. (...) This behavior, which is typical of an agreement prefix, again sets the areal prefix apart from the gender prefixes. (Thompson 1993:317)

This argument would be relevant if we would assume that the Areal marker as postpositional object has the same functions as the Areal marker as qualifier prefix,

or as Thompson puts it, as direct object. However, we have shown that this is not the case, and that the formal similarity of the prefixes as well as the historical relation between them does not imply that they are synchronically actually the same thing.

What, though, might be the reason that these prefixes have been grammaticized as postpositional object markers and possessors?

There is one fundamental similarity between agreement markers in the classical sense and the qualifier prefixes: they are co-indexed with nominal referents according to special qualities. The primary function of a person agreement affix is to indicate the person of its referent and possibly also the syntactic function of the noun. However, other meaning components that may be contained in the meaning of an agreement affix (or a pronoun, for that matter) are number, gender, or semantic class.

At least number is a meaning component present in all Dena'ina pronominal prefixes that we have seen so far. The three prefixes that are underspecified with respect to number are the plain indefinite  $k'$ , the Areal  $q$ - and the  $y$ - prefix – exactly those that are not part of the pronominal system proper. But it has also been shown that agentivity is a meaning component expressed in some of the pronominal prefixes:  $B$ - refers nearly exclusively to human or highly agentive animate referents, while the human plural  $q$ - is restricted to human referents.

The qualifier prefixes  $q$ -,  $k'$ - and  $y$ - are co-indexed with their nouns by similar features:  $y$ - co-indexes nouns that have un-agentive referents,  $k'$ - co-indexes indefinites, that is, nouns where all semantic information is missing or irrelevant to the greater context, and  $q$ - co-indexes nouns referring to locations or situations. Therefore, the semantic properties expressed by both pronominal prefixes and by the qualifiers are rather similar in nature.

From a purely semantic point of view, qualifiers and pronominal prefixes have thus a lot in common. This similarity is probably what has led to the re-analysis of these prefixes as general object markers in Athabaskan languages, and to the grammaticization of them as postpositional objects and possessor prefixes in Dena'ina.

What distinguishes Dena'ina from other Athabaskan languages is mainly the fact that the  $y$ - prefix may be co-indexed with subjects under the conditions discussed in chapter 4. According to Tuttle and Hargus (2004), this co-indexing of  $y$ - with subject referents as well as with object referents is what might have blocked the re-analysis of  $y$ - as an object marker. Similarly, the formal non-identity of human

plural *q-* and the Areal *q-*<sup>12</sup> prevents the Areal marker from being attracted to the object position.

#### 6.4 Summary

The aim of this chapter was threefold: we wanted to modify the template of the Dena'ina verb according to our findings in 5, to investigate just how the qualifier prefixes help in correctly interpreting verb forms, and how it happens that these qualifier prefixes may also be used as postpositional objects and as possessor markers.

We have seen that even though the qualifiers themselves do not convey case or role information, but are merely co-indexed with their referents because of semantic features, they, in combination with other qualifiers or with pronominal prefixes build patterns. These patterns in their turn can be interpreted; a pattern that consists only of one *y-* prefix and no other overt marker will always be interpreted as having an agentive agent and a non-agentive patient, while a pattern that consists of a *y-* and a *b-* prefix will be interpreted as denoting an non-agentive agent and an agentive patient.

As to our third goal: we have shown that there is a grammaticization path that lets qualifier prefixes function as postpositional objects and possessor markers. We have also shown that pronominal marking and qualifier marking differ mainly with respect to the marking of semantic and syntactic roles, but are similar insofar as they classify a referent according to semantic features. Thus, it is not very surprising that these prefixes make use of the existing path and become re-analyzed as postpositional objects and possessor markers, and, in other related languages, as direct object markers, too.

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<sup>12</sup> Remember that the human plural prefix has a labialized allomorph, while the Areal does not. According to Tuttle and Hargus 2004, this is the other way around in Proto-Athabaskan, where the Areal contains a rounded vowel /*ʊ*/ while the human plural prefix does not. The same thing has been observed by Kari (1990:57) for Ahtna, the closest relative of Dena'ina, where the human plural marker has the shape *k-*, while the Areal has the form *kʊ-*.

## 7 Conclusion

Dear reader, you've made it. Only one thing remains: a summary.

Throughout this study, we have been concerned with the functions and the status of what is traditionally called third person pronominal prefixes in Dena'ina Athabascan, as compared to first and second person pronominal prefixes.

We started out by investigating whether these prefixes are in complementary distribution with full NPs – as attested for several Northern Athabascan languages, e.g. Dogrib (Saxon 1986), Salcha (Tuttle 1996) and Slave (Rice 2003) – or whether they occur independent of the co-occurrence of co-referential NPs – as attested for the Apachean group of Athabascan languages (Sandoval and Jelinek 1989, Willie 1991, Jung 1999, to mention but a few). It turned out that Dena'ina fits neither pattern and is in fact more similar to Babine-Witsuwit'en (Gunlogson 2001), a northern Athabascan language spoken in Canada.

Babine-Witsuwit'en and Dena'ina constitute a third group, in which both the southern and the northern pattern are possible. As the coexistence of two patterns without a meaning difference is unlikely, the function of both the occurrence of a pronominal prefix when preceded by a co-referential NP and the lack of such a prefix were investigated. It turned out that the two patterns have indeed different functions.

The 'southern' pattern, the one with the pronominal prefix, is used when the referent is definite, thus either a proper name, possessed or accompanied by one of the determiners. The 'northern' pattern, on the other hand, the absence of the pronominal prefix, is used in all other cases. Thus, the definiteness of noun phrases is marked not only by possessive prefixes or use of determiners, but also by the presence of a co-referential pronominal prefix on the verb, postposition or (possessed) noun phrase.

It remains to be seen whether other Athabascan languages also exhibit this mixed pattern, or whether even more patterns exist.

After clarifying the question of the obligatoriness of the prefixes when preceded by a co-referential NP, we addressed several ways of object and possessor

marking. It was shown that the form of the prefix depends on two things: the form of the subject marker, and the hierarchical ranking of the subject and object/possessor referents. In the case of direct objects, the subject marker was solely responsible for the form of the object marker. In the case of postpositional objects and possessors, the speaker has some measure of choice between object prefixes, depending on the relative agency of subject and object/possessor.

After discussing object and possessor marking in great detail, we turned to subject marking. It was shown here that again, agency is an important factor in subject marking. Also, concepts like salience and attitude of the speaker towards the referents may be reflected by the choice of the pronominal prefixes.

Early on in this study, it became evident that there is considerable homonymy between subject and object prefixes (*y*- subject and *y*- object, *q*- Areal subject and *q*- Areal object, and so forth).

In chapters 3 and 4, the ones dealing with object and subject marking, respectively, it was shown that some of the prefixes – especially the *y*- marker, the Areal prefix *q*- and the indefinite prefix *k'*- – exhibit classifying functions. The referent of a *y*- subject marker after all was shown to be marked as lower in agency than the corresponding object referent, while the referent of a *q*- Areal subject or object prefix by necessity is an area, a situation, or an abstract context. The indefinite prefix *k'*- is either non-referential, or classifies a referent as being irrelevant to the discourse.

From this fact, and from the fact that the choice of these prefixes is to some degree left to the speaker rather than being governed by syntactic criteria, the question arose whether these prefixes are really pronominal in nature. It was assumed that if these prefixes are pronominal, they would have a clear subject/object distinction, if not in form, then at least in position. It was shown that a clear subject/object distinction based on either form or position can be maintained for first and second person prefixes and for the human plural marker *q*-, but not for the other prefixes.

Considering the classifying functions these other prefixes have, and

considering the fact that they occur far more towards the right within the verb word than the true pronominal prefixes, it then was shown that there is evidence for regarding them as part of the qualifier zone rather than of the pronominal zone.

This led to a reformulation of the verbal template; instead of having two argument positions (for outer subject and direct object), we found three positions within the pronominal zone for the object prefixes, the human plural marker and the first person plural subject prefix, and three other positions in the left part of the qualifier zone for the *k'*-indefinite, the Areal marker *q*- and the *y*-prefix.

Also, the question was addressed of how syntactic relations are interpreted if neither the form of a prefix nor its position indicate its role. It was shown that co-indexing patterns are responsible for the correct interpretation and that different patterns are chosen, depending on the relative agency and salience of the referents.

The final question was the grammaticization of a qualifier as a postpositional object prefix and as a possessor marker. It was shown that there is one other qualifier prefix that also has assumed these functions: the reflexive marker *d*-. Therefore, a grammaticization path exists, so that other prefixes can undergo the same process.

Again, it has to be pointed out that the results in this study are valid for Dena'ina only. Some of the neighboring languages of Dena'ina, such as Ahtna and Koyukon, have a similar 'pronominal' inventory, but whether their systems are similar to the Dena'ina system described here remains to be seen.

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