

**Marking number and obviation for possessors:  
Child and child-directed speech in Northern East Cree**

The nominal template in Northern East Cree (NEC) contains two suffixal slots for marking values of number (1), clusivity, and obviation (2) for a possessor (Collette, 2014). Here these suffixes are labeled together as **possessor (PSR) suffix** morphemes. The present study examines more than 15 hours of naturalistic video recordings from the Chisasibi Child Language Acquisition Study (Brittain et al., 2007; Henke, 2020) to offer a descriptive account of PSR suffixes in: 1) child-directed speech (CDS) from one adult; and 2) the speech of two children acquiring NEC as a first language—Daisy (from age 3;08–5;10) and Billy (4;05–5;10).

The children receive little exposure to the various PSR suffixes in CDS: Only about 10 percent of noun tokens (72/686) bear any PSR suffix morpheme. The vast majority of PSR suffix usage consists of the second-/third-person plural possessor suffix (53 tokens), with very few first-person plural (13 tokens) or obviative (six tokens) suffixes. One noun type, *îch* ‘home’, bears the lion’s share of all PSR suffix tokens (42/72, 58 percent) in CDS and may therefore play a special role in helping children identify and extrapolate PSR suffix morphemes.

Both Daisy and Billy use PSR suffixes slightly more frequently than in CDS, which includes more frequent first-person plurals. However, each child demonstrates a different level of productivity with the various plural possessor morphemes. Each child also produces so few obviative possessors that no definitive patterns can be inferred for that suffix. As in CDS, both children apply PSR suffixes to a small range of noun types, and the type *îch* ‘home’ occupies the most prominent place in their usage. Finally, both children produce double-marked noun tokens simultaneously bearing both plural and obviative possessor suffixes (3), a pattern not found in CDS but seen in elicited adult forms by Henke (2019). (*300 words, excluding examples*)

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| <p>(1)    u-tihchî-wâu-h<br/>             3-hand-2/3.PL.PSR-0p<br/>             ‘their (PROX) hands’</p>   | <p>(2)    u-misinihîkin-<b>iyiu</b><br/>             3-book-<b>OBV.PSR</b><br/>             ‘her/his (OBV) book’</p> |
| <p>(3)    âi-h            w-îch-<b>iwâ-yi</b>-hch            ani-tâh            awâ-yiuh<br/>             HES-3’    3-home-2/3.PL.PSR-<b>OBV.PSR</b>-LOC    DEM.DIST-LOC    someone-3’<br/>             ‘Uh ... somewhere at somebody’s (OBV) place’ (Daisy, 5;07)</p> |  |

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