

OBVIATIVE DEMONSTRATIVES IN NORTHERN EAST CREE: INSIGHTS FROM CHILD-DIRECTED SPEECH¹

RYAN E. HENKE

JULIE BRITTAIN

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Child-directed speech (CDS) is an important but under-documented genre within the Indigenous languages of the Americas, and recent work has argued that the documentation of CDS can also provide valuable material for linguistic description. This article analyzes more than 25 hours of video-recorded CDS in Iiyiyuymuwīn (Northern East Cree) to enrich and expand the analysis of the morphosyntax of obviation, a characteristic feature of Algonquian languages. The article elucidates under-described properties of demonstratives, particularly in possessive constructions, to show the crucial roles that obviative demonstratives can play in disambiguating syntax and marking grammatical information not encoded by co-occurring nouns and verbs. Additionally, it explores some morphosyntactic conditions behind under-described variation in obviative forms within the expansive demonstrative paradigm. The usage of particular obviative variants seems tied not to grammatical features such as distance, animacy, or number but instead to whether demonstratives serve pronominal, adnominal, or equational functions.

[KEYWORDS: child-directed speech; morphosyntax; demonstratives; obviation; Algonquian]

1. Introduction. The documentation and analysis of the Indigenous languages of what is now Canada and the United States (henceforth NA languages) have primarily centered on linguistic practice involving only adults. Here we contribute to new conversations about the value that child-directed speech (CDS) also offers to linguistic description. We examine CDS from Iiyiyuymuwīn, also called Northern East Cree (NE Cree, ISO 639-3 code *crl*), to present new, richer, and deeper insight into the morphosyntax of an NA language.

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Our findings elucidate under-described properties of demonstrative pronouns, showing the crucial roles they play in encoding the Algonquian grammatical category of obviation, particularly in possessive constructions. These roles include contributing to syntactic disambiguation within equational constructions that lack nouns and verbs; marking additional and more precise grammatical information than nouns in some contexts; and overtly encoding the obviative status of possessees when nouns—and sometimes verbs—cannot bear such marking themselves. We also offer the first dedicated exploration of some conditions behind variation in obviative forms within the expansive NE Cree demonstrative paradigm, where particular variants seem tied to morpho-syntactic function.

Before proceeding, we wish to clarify our goal in light of important and ongoing conversations around indigenizing the study of language by integrating and incorporating Indigenous perspectives, priorities, and values (Leonard 2017, 2018; Smith 2013; Wilson 2008). In this article, we approach issues of language documentation and linguistic description with a strict focus on the structural properties of NE Cree. This perspective is necessarily narrow and does not address other crucial facets of language and its centrality in building and maintaining identity, community, and culture. Our intention in illuminating such structural properties is to inform not only the scientific study of language but also community-based efforts to create new generations of speakers for NA languages such as NE Cree. For example, in communities where the intergenerational transmission of the language has been disrupted, the findings offered here can shed light on how adults speak to children during the process of language acquisition and socialization. This knowledge can be put to use in the kinds of language nest and immersion programs called for by Indigenous leadership organizations such as the Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee in the Cree Language Act of Eeyou Istchee (2019b).

We begin by discussing the traditional centering of adult language within documentary and descriptive linguistics (2). We then briefly consider language vitality and the state of linguistic documentation and description for NE Cree, including the source of data for this study (3). After reviewing reported properties of CDS in NA languages and NE Cree (4), we discuss the relevant grammatical background for this study (5). Then we present expanded and novel descriptive findings for NE Cree, derived from more than 25 hours of video-recorded CDS (6).

2. CDS and linguistic description. The fundamental ethos of modern language documentation remains the creation of primary records of linguistic practice that are as comprehensive as possible, can be preserved for as long as possible, and can be employed for a variety of purposes (e.g., Himmelmann 1998, 2006; McDonnell, Berez-Kroeker, and Holton 2018; Woodbury 2011). Documentary linguists in principle aim to represent as many textual

genres as possible, including traditional tales, narratives, conversations, formal speeches, and even word games and verbal arts (see, e.g., Austin and Grenoble 2007; Berge 2010; Riesberg 2018; Woodbury 2003). In the context of spoken language, the term *child-directed speech* refers to language spoken to young children, most typically by adults or older children. However, language documentation largely focuses on adult-level linguistic activity: CDS tends to be absent from the documentary record, despite its foundational and definitional prominence in the human linguistic experience. Others have also observed these gaps in documentation, discussed the many reasons behind them (including language loss, cultural sensitivities, privacy concerns, and methodological challenges), and made a compelling case for the value of documenting CDS and child speech—not only for the sake of language science but also for application in language revitalization and reclamation (e.g., Berge 2010; Eisenbeiß 2005; Hellwig and Jung 2020; Kelly and Nordlinger 2014; Kelly et al. 2015; Pye 2021; Sallabank 2012).

Recent, groundbreaking work has demonstrated the value that documenting CDS also offers for linguistic description. Hellwig and Jung (2020:188) provide case studies from Qaqet (Papuan) and Dëne Sų́liné (Na-Dene) to argue that analyzing CDS “can inform our understanding of the adult language and the metalinguistic knowledge of adults.” For example, Hellwig and Jung show that CDS in both languages reveals underlying forms that are often obscured by morphophonological processes in adult-level speech. Furthermore, the authors attest that CDS shines new light on the distribution of discontinuous noun phrases in Qaqet and on distinctions between classificatory verbs in Dëne Sų́liné. In brief, Hellwig and Jung illustrate that documentation of CDS—when it exists—can be used not just for understanding language acquisition but also to enrich linguistic description that is especially valuable for under-documented and under-described languages.

3. NE Cree and existing linguistic description. NE Cree is a variety in the Cree-Innu-Naskapi dialect complex of the Algonquian language family (MacKenzie 1980). Spoken in four communities within Eeyou Istchee territory in Northern Québec, NE Cree has several thousand native speakers (Grand Council of the Crees 2019a; Henke 2020; Junker, MacKenzie, and Brittain 2012). Despite this large number of speakers comprising all age groups, communities in Eeyou Istchee are experiencing rapid language shift and loss under increasing influence from English (Brittain and MacKenzie 2010; Collette 2018; Grand Council of the Crees 2019b; Louttit et al. 2018).

Focused on NE Cree as spoken in the Cree Nation of Chisasibi, the Chisasibi Child Language Acquisition Study (CCLAS) is one of the very few ongoing projects dedicated to the native-tongue acquisition of an NA language.² Brittain

² See the CCLAS website at <https://www.mun.ca/ccclas/>.

et al. (2007) provide details on the history and methodology of CCLAS, including community support for the project. CCLAS revolves around a documentary corpus of approximately 60 hours of video recordings representing naturalistic interactions in home environments between adults and three children between the ages of two and six. These recordings are richly annotated, including transcriptions of child speech and translations from native speakers of NE Cree. The CCLAS corpus thus constitutes a rare documentary record of underrepresented genres of speech. Most of the CCLAS corpus is protected by strict privacy agreements with participating families and available only with permission, but some CCLAS transcripts and audio files are publicly accessible through PhonBank.³

Importantly, Eeyou Istchee communities and organizations have also created—and continue to produce—a plethora of NE Cree-language media and resources, which constitute an extensive body of language documentation. For instance, the James Bay Cree Communication Society was founded in 1981 and provides regional Cree-language radio programming throughout Eeyou Istchee.⁴ As another example, the interactive East Cree language website *eastcree.org* began in 2000 as a partnership between the Cree Programs department of the Cree School Board and Marie-Odile Junker (see, e.g., Junker, Salt, and Visitor 2013), and the website currently makes available more than 500 audio recordings of oral stories in East Cree.⁵

Despite this wealth of documentation, however, NE Cree remains under-described linguistically (Collette 2014). Recent linguistic description includes the online East Cree reference grammar, which has fleshed out broad grammatical mechanics (Junker, Salt, and Visitor 2013), and several linguistic investigations have focused on more particular facets of the language (e.g., Collette 2014; Junker 2003, 2004; Junker and MacKenzie 2003). Some CCLAS research has also focused on linguistic description of elements in adult language as a prerequisite to understanding and analyzing child language (e.g., Brittain and Rose 2021; Cunningham 2008; Dyck, Brittain, and MacKenzie 2014; Dyck, Power, and Terry 2006; O'Neill 2013). Nevertheless, much remains to be learned about NE Cree from the perspective of descriptive linguistics, and there remains much to do in applying these findings to benefit language teaching and revitalization/reclamation programs. In this study, we show that the CDS represented in the CCLAS corpus provides fertile ground for deriving such linguistic description.

4. The properties of CDS in NE Cree. A traditional focus of cross-linguistic research has been whether and how CDS differs from adult language

³ These records may be accessed at <https://phonbank.talkbank.org/access/Other/Cree/CCLAS.html>.

⁴ See the James Bay Cree Communication Society website at www.creeradio.com.

⁵ The oral stories may be accessed at www.eastcree.org/cree/en/stories/.

(e.g., Ferguson 1978; Gallaway and Richards 1994; Snow and Ferguson 1977). Such research has demonstrated that CDS often employs modifications and simplifications at lexical, phonological, and morphosyntactic levels, which facilitate language acquisition through adaptations for a child's stage of development as well as scaffolding for further development (see, e.g., reviews by Rowe and Snow 2020; Saint-Georges et al. 2013). For example, differences from adult-level speech can include shorter and simpler—yet grammatical—syntactic structures and higher proportions of utterance types such as questions and imperatives. This body of work tends to focus on European and Asian languages with many speakers (Kelly et al. 2015), and relatively little is known about the properties of CDS in NA languages.

A recent review by Chee and Henke (forthcoming) reveals a somewhat mixed picture of the properties of CDS within the scant published literature from NA languages. Chee and Henke show that CDS may use reduced segmental inventories and syllable structures but also careful and emphatic articulations that illustrate phonological properties of the adult language. CDS in NA languages may simplify processes of affixation and reduce utterance length, but it can also employ frequent and rich inflectional and derivational morphosyntax.

A limited number of observations have been published on the properties of CDS in East Cree. Jones (1986, 1988) claims that CDS begins with uninflected child vocabulary before progressing to child forms with limited inflection, adult forms with limited inflection, and then fully inflected adult forms. More recent studies of the CCLAS corpus indicate that CDS employs the full inflectional template for nouns (Henke 2020) while using high proportions of questions and imperatives (Terry 2010). CDS in the CCLAS corpus also frequently uses null-copula equational constructions and questions (Henke 2020), which lack the verbal structures that command so much attention in descriptions of adult-level speech in Algonquian languages. As reported in broader literature on CDS (Clark 2009; Rowe and Snow 2020), adult-child conversations in the CCLAS corpus often focus on events and objects in the here and now, involving demonstrative pronouns to signify referents established in joint attention. Lastly, constructions featuring possession figure prominently in CDS (Henke 2019, 2020), due to the interests children acquiring any language have in their own possessions and the possessions of their peers, family members, and caretakers (Eisenbeiß, Matsuo, and Sonnenstuhl 2009). Altogether these characteristics position CDS in NE Cree to provide unique insight into linguistic patterns that may not be as common or readily apparent in adult-level speech.

5. Grammatical background. This section reviews relevant grammatical information and draws together examples from three sources (Collette 2014; Junker and MacKenzie 2003; Junker, Salt, and Visitor 2013). We review

basic facts related to nouns, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive constructions in NE Cree. Our primary focus is demonstrative pronouns, but an understanding of nouns is required to grasp the characteristics of demonstratives. We use the term *nominal* to refer to nouns and demonstratives together. Demonstratives are of particular significance because they are quite under-described despite the fact that East Cree has an “exceptionally full set of demonstratives” compared to most Cree-Innu-Naskapi varieties (Junker and MacKenzie 2003:201).

We present examples using particular notation conventions, as in (1).⁶

- (1) Naashch aah miywaashiyich-h uyaah umisinihiikin.
 naashch aah miywaashi-yichh u-yaah
 very.much PVB be.good_{II}-PL:OBV_{CJ} DEM:PXL-INAN:OBV:PL
 u=misinihiikin-h
 3=book-INAN:PL
 ‘Her books here are so nice.’

(Adult, A1.08, 2;04, 37:50)

The first line in (1) represents an NE Cree example in Standard Roman Orthography. In this orthography, long vowels are written with digraphs such as <aa>. The grapheme <y> generally corresponds to /j/, <ch> to /tʃ/, and <sh> to /ʃ/. A hyphen is used to separate two consecutive <h> symbols and to separate the symbols <s> from <h> when needed to prevent interpreting <sh> as [ʃ].

Following Drapeau et al. (2019), the third line in (1) includes a subscript notation with the verb stem to indicate the verb class. The last verbal suffix also includes a subscript notation signifying the particular inflectional paradigm (called an “order” in Algonquian linguistic parlance). Sources include traditional academic publications, but we also cite data taken from CCLAS recordings. As in (1), citations specify the codename of the speaker, the name of the recording session within the CCLAS corpus, the age of the child present using the format *years;months*, and a timestamp for the utterance within the recording.

5.1. Basic inflectional properties of nominals. The main inflectional forms of nominals depend upon three interacting grammatical categories—animacy,

⁶ Abbreviations used in interlinearized examples are > (acts upon); 1 (first person); 2 (second person); 3 (third person); AI (intransitive verb with an animate subject); AN (animate); APPL (applicative); CJ (conjunct order); DEM (demonstrative); DIM (diminutive); DIR (direct); DIST (distal); EMPH (emphatic particle); EXCL (exclusive); FOC (focus); HES (hesitation); II (intransitive verb with an inanimate subject); IMP (imperative); INAN (inanimate); INCL (inclusive); IND (independent order); INTJ (interjection); LOC (locative); NEG (negation); OBV (obviative); PL (plural); POSS (possessive); PROX (proximate); PSR (possessor); PST (past); PVB (preverb); PXL (proximal); Q (question); SAP (speech-act participant); SG (singular); TA (transitive verb with an animate object); TI (transitive verb with an inanimate object).

number, and obviation. As in other Algonquian languages (Bloomfield 1946; Goddard 2002), each noun in NE Cree is classified as either animate or inanimate. This classification is grounded largely, but not entirely, in biological reality. Humans and animals, but also some kinds of plants and personal belongings, are grammatically animate (2).

(2) atim ‘dog’, awaashish ‘child’, piyichiis ‘pants’, utaahiimin ‘strawberry’

Nonliving things are generally classified as grammatically inanimate (3). Some classifications may seem arbitrary, such as animate *piyichiis* ‘pants’ versus inanimate *pichiwiyaan* ‘shirt’ or animate *utaahiimin* ‘strawberry’ versus inanimate *miinish* ‘berry’.

(3) aashukin ‘bridge’, miinish ‘berry’, misinihiikin ‘book’, pichiwiyaan ‘shirt’

Demonstratives serve various primary functions in NE Cree. They can be used as pronominal elements signifying either animate or inanimate referents (4–5).

(4) uu
uu
DEM:PXL
‘this (AN/INAN)’

(5) an
an
DEM:DIST
‘that (AN/INAN)’

They also occur as adnominal modifiers (6–7).

(6) uu awaashish
uu awaashish
DEM:PXL child
‘this child’

(7) an nipaawin
an nipaawin
DEM:DIST bed
‘that bed’

Lastly, demonstratives can serve an equational function in null-copula constructions (8–9).

(8) Awaashish uu.
awaashish uu
child DEM:PXL
‘This is a child.’

- (9) Nipaawin an.
 nipaawin an
 bed DEM:DIST
 ‘That is a bed.’

Animacy affects nearly all facets of East Cree grammar, including the indication of number for nominals. Nouns are either singular or plural in number. Singular nouns and demonstratives have no special suffix, whether they are animate or inanimate (2–9).

The remaining discussion in this section centers on inflectional suffixes for nouns and demonstratives. For ongoing reference, table 1 lists the noun suffixes conditioned by animacy, number, and obviation.

Table 2 provides the inflectional forms for demonstratives, where suffixes also hinge upon animacy, number, and obviation. For brevity, we do not consider “Set Two” demonstratives (Junker and MacKenzie 2003), which add an emphatic particle to the stem. Obviative demonstratives show variation between forms—for example, *uyaa* and *uyaayiu* both signify inanimate obviative singular. We revisit this variation at the end of 5.1.

Plural nouns require a suffix that depends upon animacy. Animate nouns take the suffix *-(i)ch* (10), and animate demonstratives take *-(i)chii* (11).

- (10) awaashishich
 awaashish-**ich**
 child-**AN:PL**
 ‘children’
- (11) uchii awaashishich
 u-**chii** awaashish-**ich**
 DEM:PXL-**AN:PL** child-**AN:PL**
 ‘these children’

Inanimate nouns take the suffix *-h* (12), and inanimate demonstratives use *-(i)hii* (13).

TABLE 1
 NOUN SUFFIXES IN NE CREE

	Proximate		Obviative	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Animate	∅	-(i)ch	-h	-h
Inanimate	∅	-h	-(i)yi	-h

Note: ∅ = no suffix.

TABLE 2
DEMONSTRATIVE FORMS IN NE CREE

Distance	Stem	Animate				Inanimate	
		Proximate		Obviative		Obviative	
		Plural		Plural		Singular	Plural
Proximal	uu	uchii	uyaah uyaayiuh	uhii	uyaa uyaayiu	uyaah uyaayiuh	
Distal	an	anichii	aniyaah aniyaayiuh	anhii	aniyaa aniyaayiu	aniyaah aniyaayiuh	
Remote	naah (AN) naa (INAN)	naachii	naayaah naayaayiuh	naahii	naayaa naayaayiu	naayaah naayaayiuh	

- (12) nipaawinh
 nipaawin-**h**
 bed-**INAN:PL**
 ‘beds’
- (13) uhii nipaawinh
 u-**hii** nipaawin-**h**
 DEM:PXL-**INAN:PL** bed-**INAN:PL**
 ‘these beds’

Lastly, the basic inflection of nominals also depends upon the grammatical category of obviation. A hallmark of Algonquian languages, obviation distinguishes among third persons (Bloomfield 1946). Obviation interacts with complex considerations of syntax and discourse (e.g., Dahlstrom 1996; Goddard 1990; Junker 2004; Russell 1996), but the basic principle is straightforward: within a particular span such as a phrase or clause, one third person is designated *proximate*, and all other third persons are obligatorily designated *obviative*. In general, the proximate is the focus or topic in the foreground, with obviative third persons relegated more to the background. Every third-person nominal used in NE Cree speech must be either proximate or obviative, and this designation interacts with animacy and number to affect the form of nouns and demonstratives.

For animates, proximate nouns are morphologically unmarked (14), but obviative nouns require the suffix *-h* (15).

- (14) utaahiimin
 utaahiimin
 strawberry
 ‘strawberry (PROX)’
- (15) utaahiiminh
 utaahiimin-**h**
 strawberry-**AN:OBV**
 ‘strawberry/strawberries (OBV)’

Animate obviative nouns cannot take plural marking and are in fact neutral with respect to number. The interpretation of singular or plural for an animate obviative, as in (15), is derivable from context alone. Animate obviative demonstratives are also ambiguous for number (16–17).

- (16) uyaah
 u-**yaah**
 DEM:PXL-**AN:OBV**
 ‘this/these (OBV)’

- (17) uyaah utaahiiminh
 u-**yaah** utaahiimin-**h**
 DEM:PXL-AN:OBV strawberry-AN:OBV
 ‘this strawberry/these strawberries (OBV)’

As with animates, inanimate proximate nouns require no dedicated suffix when singular. When obviative, singular inanimate nouns take the suffix *-(i)yi* (18) rather than *-h*.

- (18) nipaawiniyu
 nipaawin-**iyiu**
 bed-INAN:OBV:SG
 ‘bed (OBV)’

However, when plural, inanimate nouns allow no obviative marking and can only bear the inanimate plural suffix *-h*. The interpretation of proximate or obviative status in (19) must come from additional context.

- (19) nipaawinh
 nipaawin-**h**
 bed-INAN:PL
 ‘beds (PROX/OBV)’

Nouns also can take a locative suffix, which is in complementary distribution with the suffixes marking animacy, number, and obviation. In contrast to (18) and (12)/(19), the plural or obviative status of the noun in (20) must be inferred from context or other words in a construction.

- (20) nipaawinihch
 nipaawin-**ihch**
 bed-LOC
 ‘on the bed(s) (PROX/OBV)’

Marking for inanimate demonstratives differs from patterns with inanimate nouns. When singular, demonstratives also use no special suffix to signify proximate referents, but they do mark a number distinction between obviative singular (21) and obviative plural (22).

- (21) uyaa nipaawiniyu
 u-**yaa** nipaawin-**iyiu**
 DEM:PXL-INAN:OBV:SG bed-INAN:OBV:SG
 ‘this bed (OBV)’
- (22) uyaah nipaawinh
 u-**yaah** nipaawin-**h**
 DEM:PXL-INAN:OBV:PL bed- INAN:PL
 ‘these beds (OBV)’

In this sense, inanimate demonstratives encode more specific grammatical information than inanimate nouns: in (22), the noun form indexes only animacy and number, but the demonstrative indicates that the referent is inanimate, plural, *and* obviative.

As a final point regarding obviation, existing descriptions note variation between obviative demonstrative word forms. For example, the paradigms available through the East Cree reference grammar (Junker, Salt, and MacKenzie 2015, based on Junker and MacKenzie 2003) list two forms for every category of obviative demonstrative (see table 2). The form *uyaa* ‘this (INAN:OBV:SG)’ can also be pronounced *uyayiu*, and its plural correspondent can be either *uyaah* ‘these (INAN:OBV:PL)’ or *uyayiuh*. This variation has not been yet explored in depth, and the only relevant commentary available is “Southern [East Cree] speakers prefer the shorter version but recognize the longer one, which seems to be preferred by the Northern [East Cree speakers]” (Junker and MacKenzie 2003:203). The current study provides the first dedicated analysis of this variation in 7.3.

5.2. Nominals in possessive constructions. Possession presents the richest inflectional possibilities for nouns, where templatic morphology encodes grammatical information related to the possessor and the possessee. First, the person of the possessor is marked by clitics, as in (23–25).

- (23) *nimisinihiikin*
ni=*misinihiikin*
1=book
 ‘my book’
- (24) *chimisinihiikin*
chi=*misinihiikin*
2=book
 ‘your book’
- (25) *umisinihiikin*
u=*misinihiikin*
3=book
 ‘her/his (own) book’

The plurality of possessors is indicated via various suffixes. First-person plural includes a distinction between the exclusive form *-(i)naan* (26) and the inclusive form *-(i)niu* (27).

- (26) *nimisinihiikininaan*
 ni=*misinihiikin*-**inaan**
 1=book-**1PL:EXCL**
 ‘our book (not yours)’

- (27) chimisihikiini
 chi=misihikiin-**iniu**
 2=book-**1PL:INCL**
 ‘our book (and yours)’

Second- and third-person possessors take the plural suffix *-(i)waau* (28–29).

- (28) chimisihikiiniwaau
 chi=misihikiin-**iwaau**
 2=book-**2/3PL**
 ‘your (PL) book’
- (29) umisihikiiniwaau
 u=misihikiin-**iwaau**
 3=book-**2/3PL**
 ‘their (own) book’

Finally, the possessor suffix *-(i)yi* is required for an obviative possessor (30).

- (30) umisihikiiniyi
 u=misihikiin-**iyi**
 3=book-**OBV:PSR**
 ‘her/his (OBV) book’

Additional suffixes encode information pertaining to the possessee. First, a possessive suffix *-im* is required by some noun stems to signify they are possessed, as in (31–32) versus (23–30).

- (31) awaashish
 awaashish
 child
 ‘child’
- (32) nitiwaashishiim
 nit=iwaashish-**iim**
 1=child-**POSS**
 ‘my child’

This suffix *-im* occurs in its own slot within the noun template, immediately following the noun stem. Whether a given noun stem requires *-im* when possessed has no bearing on the suffixes marking animacy, number, and obviation (table 1), which appear in a different slot within the noun template, so we do not discuss *-im* further. See Collette (2014:282–326) for a lengthy discussion of the distribution of *-im* across categories of noun stems.

Possessed nouns also bear the suffixes delineated in 5.1 (table 1), which provide information pertaining to animacy, number, and obviation of the possessee. This includes, for example, marking plural (33–34) as well as obviative forms (35–36).

- (33) nitiwaashishiimich
 nit=iwaashish-iim-**ich**
 1=child-POSS-**AN:PL**
 ‘my children’
- (34) nimisinihiikinh
 ni=misinihiikin-**h**
 1=book-**INAN:PL**
 ‘my books’
- (35) nitiwaashishiimh
 nit=iwaashish-iim-**h**
 1=child-POSS-**AN:OBV**
 ‘my child/children (OBV)’
- (36) nimisinihiikiniyu
 ni=misinihiikin-**iyiu**
 1=book-**INAN:OBV:SG**
 ‘my book (OBV)’

Possesseees are necessarily third person, so when the possessor is also third person, the possessee is obligatorily obviative because multiple third persons exist in the same span. Algonquian linguistic tradition calls this phenomenon *possessor obviation* (Rhodes 1990), which is illustrated in (37) and (38).

- (37) nitiwaashishiim
 nit=iwaashish-iim
 1=child-POSS
 ‘my child’
- (38) utiwaashishiimh
 ut=iwaashish-iim-**h**
 3=child-POSS-**AN:OBV**
 ‘her/his (own) child (OBV)’

Possessor obviation reveals an important grammatical difference contingent on animacy. Animate nouns with third-person possessors, as in (38), require an obviative suffix. The inanimate possessee *nipaawin* ‘bed’ in (39) is the only third person in the construction, so it is proximate, but the third-person possessor in (40) renders the possessee obviative.

(39) ninipaawin
 ni=nipaawin
 1=bed
 ‘my bed’

(40) unipaawin
 u=nipaawin
 3=bed
 ‘her/his (own) bed (OBV)’

However, possessor obviation disallows the inanimate singular obviative suffix *-(i)yiiu* for the possessee in (40). In fact, the presence of the suffix in (41) actually indicates that the possessor is obviative, as in (30), which renders an incorrect interpretation of the intended meaning.

(41) unipaawiniyiu
 u=nipaawin-***iyiu**
 3=bed-***INAN:OBV:SG**
 ‘her/his *(own) bed’

Crucially, inanimate nouns in possessor obviation, such as (40), are still obviative despite the fact that they can bear no overt obviative marking. The clue to the obviative status of these nouns comes from agreement with other words.

Previous descriptions of Southern East Cree (Junker 2003; Junker and Blacksmith 2001) explain one such pattern. In (42–43) the inanimate noun allows no obviative suffix because of possessor obviation.

(42) Waapahtam umuuhkumaan.
 waapahtam u=muuhkumaan
 see_{TI}:3SG>INAN_{IND} 3=knife
 ‘S/he sees her/his (own) knife (OBV).’

(Junker and Blacksmith 2001:259)

(43) Waapahtam umuuhkumaan kaa piikipayiyich.
 waapahtam u=muuhkumaan kaa piikipayi-**yich**
 see_{TI}:3SG>INAN_{IND} 3=knife PVB be.broken_{II}-**SG:OBV_{CI}**
 ‘S/he sees her/his (own) broken knife (OBV).’

(Junker and Blacksmith 2001:259)

In both examples, the verb *waapahtam* ‘s/he sees it’ does not index the proximate or obviative status of the object. However, in (43) the modifying verb *piikupayuu* ‘it is broken’ requires an obviative form to agree with the obviative object. This agreement indicates that *umuuhkumaan* ‘her/his (own) knife’ is actually *covertly* obviative. These descriptions focus on verbal patterns and thus

say nothing about how demonstratives pattern with possessee nouns in possessor obviation.

As Henke (2019, 2020) has noted, previous grammatical descriptions of NE Cree tend to focus on nouns rather than demonstratives in discussions of possession. These accounts primarily deal with demonstratives in passing because they focus on other phenomena in the language. Accordingly, existing descriptions tend to provide just one or two examples that illustrate patterns related to demonstratives in possessive constructions.

Some examples from existing descriptions show demonstratives serving as a possessee in equational constructions (44–45).

- (44) Niiyi an.
 niiyi **an**
 1 **DEM:DIST**
 ‘That is mine.’

(Junker, Salt, and MacKenzie 2005)

- (45) Chiyyi uu, nimaa?
 chiyyi **uu** nimaa
 2 **DEM:PXL** NEG
 ‘This is yours, right?’

(Collette 2014:254)

A handful of Collette’s (2014) examples have demonstratives agreeing with possessee nouns in adnominal or equational configurations. In (46), both nominals are animate, proximate, and singular, so no suffixes appear.

- (46) Nistaas uu.
 ni=staas uu
 1=older.brother **DEM:PXL**
 ‘He is my older brother.’

(Collette 2014:124)

In (47), both nominals are animate and obviative, so each takes the required suffix.

- (47) aniyaayiuu ukauuwaauh
 an-**iyaayiuh** u=kaau-waau-**h**
 DEM:DIST-AN:OBV 3=mother-2/3PL-AN:OBV
 ‘their (own) mother’

(adapted from Collette 2014:267)

A careful reading of Collette (2014) yields a few examples of demonstratives in possessor obviation. In (48–49) each takes an obviative form to agree with the covertly obviative noun.

- (48) aniyiu uwaaskaahiikanim
 an-iyiu u=waaskaahiikan-im
 DEM: DIST-INAN:OBV:SG 3=house-POSS
 ‘her/his (own) house (OBV)’

(adapted from Collette 2014:296)

- (49) uyaayiu uspituun
 u-yaayiu u=spituun
 DEM: PXL-INAN:OBV:SG 3=arm
 ‘its (own) arm (OBV)’

(adapted from Collette 2014:314)

However, this linguistic description offers no explicit acknowledgement or analysis of the pattern because it focuses on other grammatical issues.

5.3. Summary. Previous grammatical description has largely laid out the basic inflectional properties of nominals in NE Cree, including how interacting grammatical categories of animacy, number, and obviation affect the forms of nouns and demonstratives. Obviation in particular is a classic grammatical hallmark of Algonquian languages, and the rich demonstrative inventory of NE Cree includes nearly 20 obviative word forms (table 2). However, existing sources only scratch the surface when it comes to describing (1) variation between obviative demonstrative forms and (2) the usage and forms of obviative demonstratives in possessive constructions, particularly within possessor obviation contexts that condition differential inflectional patterns for nouns.

6. The data for this study. We sampled 40 video recordings from the CCLAS corpus, which together constitute more than 25 total hours of linguistic interactions. These interactions involve primarily one adult and three children between the ages of 2;01 to 5;10 from three different families. The primary adult in these videos was the project coordinator for CCLAS when the videos were recorded (Brittain et al. 2007). She is a resident of Chisasibi and native speaker of NE Cree who was in her thirties at the time of recording. The videos occasionally capture largely incidental CDS from other adults, so CDS from all adults is considered together.

Each of the three children involved in the CCLAS project was filmed interacting with the project coordinator approximately every two weeks, for an average of 45 minutes per recording session, between November 2004 and April 2007. Interactions were mostly unstructured and free flowing. Each of the children was familiar and comfortable with the project coordinator, who would encourage the children to use NE Cree throughout activities such as pretend play, looking through picture books and making up stories, and talking about events and people in their lives. After the videos were recorded, they

were processed using Phon,⁷ a freely available software program developed for language acquisition data management and phonological analysis (Rose et al. 2006; Rose and MacWhinney 2014). The project coordinator provided oral translations and commentary for the speech in the videos, and others on the CCLAS team handled data processing such as speech segmentation and transcription into Cree orthography. See Brittain et al. (2007) for additional details on CCLAS data collection and processing.

The 40 videos we selected for the present study comprise a sample of convenience that covers the widest possible range of development for each of the three children while using the highest-quality recordings. We chose videos about every one or two months for each child, although some larger gaps do exist due to either a lack of recordings or analyzable recordings.

The sample contains 17,181 total child-directed utterances, which includes a total of 1,768 demonstrative tokens across 21 different types. We define a type as an individual demonstrative word form such as *uu* ‘this (AN/INAN:PROX:SG)’ and a token as one spoken instance of a particular type. Obviative forms of demonstratives show variation, and each variant is counted as its own type. Table 3 categorizes all relevant demonstrative tokens by type, with the total tokens for each type provided in parentheses. No remote forms from CDS in the sample are obviative, so 40 remote demonstrative tokens are excluded from subsequent analysis.

Table 3 shows that CDS employs much of the demonstrative paradigm, but important imbalances exist between types. Bare stems proximal *uu* ‘this’ and distal *an* ‘that’ predominate. Only 40 remote tokens are used—*naa* ‘that (INAN)’ (23 tokens), *naah* ‘that (AN)’ (11), and *naachii* ‘those (AN:PL)’ (6).

Overall, CDS uses 314 total obviative demonstrative tokens (table 3). We examine these obviative demonstratives in equational constructions (7.1) and in possessor obviation (7.2) before considering morphosyntactic influences on variation in obviative forms (7.3).

7. Results: Insights from obviative demonstratives in CDS. In this section, we analyze CDS in NE Cree to shed additional light on the morphosyntax of an under-described language. We focus on obviation and demonstratives for three reasons. First, obviation represents a particularly “Algonquian” linguistic system with special interest for not only linguists but also people working to teach and revitalize/reclaim Algonquian languages. Second, the demonstrative system of NE Cree is especially rich but under-described. Third, existing descriptions hint that demonstratives may play a special role in encoding

⁷ Phon’s website is accessible at www.phon.ca.

TABLE 3
ALL DEMONSTRATIVE TYPES AND TOKENS IN CDS

Distance	Stem	Animate		Inanimate		Total
		Proximate Plural	Obviative	Proximate Plural	Obviative Singular	
Proximal	uu (498)	uchii (36)	uyaah (17) uyaayih (15)	uhii (44)	uyaa (32) uyaayiu (37)	uyaah (11) uyaayih (8)
Distal	an (719)	anichii (53)	aniyaah (39) aniyaayih (31)	anhii (64)	aniyaa (68) aniyaayiu (34)	aniyaah (13) aniyaayih (9)
Total	1217	89	102	108	171	41

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of tokens per type. Total refers to the number of tokens. No remote forms from CDS in the sample are obviative, so remote demonstratives are not included.

obviation, especially in contexts when other words do not encode the same grammatical information.

7.1. Obviative demonstratives in equational possessive constructions. We begin with the role that obviative demonstratives play in equational constructions, specifically in contexts of possession. To review, equational constructions are null-copula structures that often lack nouns and modifying verbs that could encode obviation, and existing descriptions of possession in NE Cree focus almost exclusively on constructions involving inflected nouns as possessives. However, previous CCLAS research (Henke 2019, 2020, 2021) has shown that demonstratives can play an important role as possessives in equational constructions—in the absence of any nouns bearing possessive inflection.

For example, the youngest child represented in the CCLAS corpus (code-named Ani) begins using demonstratives as possessives at age 2;01. In (50) her demonstrative serves as the only nominal signifying a possessee in the utterance, and Ani uses such equational constructions as her primary means of expressing possession from age 2;01 to 4;03.

- (50) Niiyi uu.
 niiyi uu
 1 DEM:PxL
 ‘This is mine.’

(Ani, A1.03, 2;01, 09:27)

We expand upon these previous findings to draw more deeply from CDS and provide richer description of obviative demonstratives in equational constructions expressing possession.

The CDS sampled for this study contains 75 total demonstrative tokens signifying the possessee in equational constructions, as in (50). Table 4 presents all such demonstrative types, with tokens per type again indicated in parentheses.

These numbers indicate that less than half of the demonstrative possessives in CDS (30/75 tokens, 40%) consist of proximate—not obviative—forms. Nearly all such proximate examples involve just a bare demonstrative stem that encodes only distance (51–52).

- (51) Chiiyi aa uu?
 chiiyi aa uu
 2 Q DEM:PxL
 ‘Is this yours?’

(Adult, B1.04, 3;11, 31:47)

TABLE 4
ALL DEMONSTRATIVES AS POSSESSES WITHIN EQUATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Distance	Stem	Animate			Inanimate			Total
		Proximate		Obviative	Proximate		Obviative	
		Plural	Obviative		Plural	Obviative		
Proximal	uu (15)	uchii (0)	uyaah (2) uyaayituh (1)	uhii (1)	uyaa (1) uyaayiu (15)	uyaah (0) uyaayituh (4)	39	
Distal	an (12)	anichii (0)	aniyaah (0) aniyaayituh (6)	anihii (2)	aniyaa (8) aniyaayiu (5)	aniyaah (1) aniyaayituh (2)	36	
Total	27	0	9	3	29	7	75	

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of tokens per type. Total refers to the number of tokens. No remote forms from CDS in the sample are obviative, so remote demonstratives are not included.

- (52) Chiiyi aa an?
 chiiyi aa **an**
 2 Q **DEM:DIST**
 ‘Is that yours?’

(Adult, A1.17, 2;09, 03:05)

Only three proximate tokens encode plural number, as in (53–54).

- (53) Chiiyi uhii, nimaa?
 chiiyi u-**hii** nimaa
 2 **DEM:PXL-INAN:PL** NEG
 ‘These are yours, eh?’

(Adult, B1.05, 4;00, 31:52)

- (54) Kaa ihtuth nimiyaauh anihii chiiyi!
 kaa ihtut-h [nimiyaauh an-**ihii** chiiyi]
 NEG do_{TI}-2SG>INAN_{IMP} [NEG **DEM:DIST-INAN:PL** 2]
 ‘Don’t touch them! They’re not yours!’

(Adult, B1.05, 4;00, 36:37)

In (54) the bracketed equational construction contains the negative marker *nimiyaauh*, which conditions a change in word order, but the demonstrative remains the sole nominal referring to the possessee.

Importantly, the majority of the demonstrative tokens in table 4 (45/75, 60%) encode not only distance but also obviative values interacting with animacy and number. Examples from CDS illustrate how the overt encoding of obviation for demonstratives can provide crucial information for interpreting an equational construction: in fact, the obviative marking of a demonstrative is often the only grammatical clue indicating a possessive relationship. CDS contains minimal pairs of ambiguous equational constructions such as (55) versus (56), where only context clarifies an expression of possession.

- (55) Niiyi an.
 niiyi **an**
 1 **DEM:DIST**
 ‘That is me.’

(Adult, B1.08, 4;02, 30:55)

- (56) Niiyi an.
 niiyi **an**
 1 **DEM:DIST**
 ‘That is mine.’

(Adult, A1.09, 2;05, 17:41)

Equational constructions involving third-person entities, however, illustrate how obviative marking on a demonstrative can necessarily indicate possession and disambiguate the syntactic structure of the construction.

For instance, in (57) the name and the demonstrative are two third-person elements in the same phrase. Both are proximate, so they must refer to the same entity.

- (57) (Name) an.
 (name) an
 name DEM:DIST
 ‘That is (name).’

(Adult, A1.33, 3;08, 06:00)

On the other hand, the name in (58) is proximate while the demonstrative is obviative.

- (58) (Name) aniyaayih.
 (name) an-**iyaayih**
 name DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘That is (name)’s’

(Adult, B1.27, 5;04, 16:45)

Each nominal in (58) therefore refers to a different entity. Furthermore, the obviative status of the demonstrative indicates that the rules of possessor obviation have applied: the demonstrative must signify a possessee.

This disambiguating role is quite prominent in CDS. The sample for this study contains 109 total obviative demonstrative tokens in equational constructions (analyzed further in 7.3).

Nine of these 109 tokens (8.26%) co-occur with a possessee noun, where both nominals are marked obviative. This agreement indicates that both nominals refer to the same entity. Because the noun bears possessive inflection, the demonstrative does not alone encode a possessive relationship, as in (59).

- (59) Umis-h aniyaayih.
 u=mis-**h** an-**iyaayih**
 3=older.sister-**AN:OBV** DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘That is her sister.’

(Adult, B3.18, 5;10, 19:53)

Another 55 of these 109 tokens (50.46%) do not disambiguate syntax either. These do not co-occur with a possessee noun, but the demonstrative agrees with the obviative status of the other nominal in the equational construction. Again, this agreement indicates that both nominals refer to the same entity, and the demonstrative does not necessarily encode a possessive relationship, as in (60).

- (60) Awaayih aniyaayih?
 awaa-**yiuh** an-**iyaayih**
 who-**AN:OBV** DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘Who is that?’

(Adult, B1.02, 4;04, 04:18)

The remaining 45 of these 109 tokens (41.28%)—all the obviative demonstratives tallied in table 4—do the job of disambiguating possessive syntax. In (61), proximate *awaan* ‘who (AN:PROX)’ and obviative *aniyaayih* ‘that (AN:OBV)’ cannot refer to the same entity.

- (61) Awaan aniyaayih?
 awaan an-**iyaayih**
 who DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘Whose is that?’

(Adult, B1.24, 5;00, 24:41)

Therefore, the demonstrative in (61) must encode a possessive relationship within a context of possessor obviation.

CDS uses demonstratives to signify animate and inanimate possessees while overtly encoding their obviative status. We turn now to describing examples from each relevant configuration of grammatical values. CDS employs animate obviative demonstratives as possessees in (62–63).

- (62) Awaan uyaayih?
 awaan u-**yaayih**
 who DEM:PXL-**AN:OBV**
 ‘Whose is this?’

(Adult, A1.26, 3;04, 17:57)

- (63) Awaan aniyaayih?
 awaan an-**iyaayih**
 who DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘Whose is that?’

(Adult, B1.24, 5;00, 24:41)

The adult refers to a truck in (62) and to a car in (63), both of which are grammatically animate. The third-person possessor *awaan* ‘who (AN:PROX)’ renders each demonstrative subject to possessor obviation and requiring a suffix encoding its animate and obviative status.

Inanimate obviative singular demonstratives occur as possessees in (64–65).

- (64) Awaan uyaa, chimushumh?
 awaan u-**yaa** chi=mushu-m-h
 who DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG** 2=grandfather-POSS-Q
 ‘Whose is this one, your grandpa’s?’
 (Adult, B1.03, 3;09, 16:28)

- (65) Wiyi uyaayiu?
 wiyi u-**yaayiu**
 3 DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG**
 ‘This is hers.’
 (Adult, A1.24, 3;02, 03:51)

The adult refers to a toy cup in (64) and to a doll’s shirt in (65), both of which are grammatically inanimate. Unlike inanimate nouns in possessor obviation (5.2), these inanimate demonstratives do indeed require a suffix to encode their obviate status.

Lastly, CDS also employs inanimate obviate plural demonstratives as possessives in (66–67). In such contexts, inanimate nouns would bear only plural marking (5.2).

- (66) Awaan uyaayiuh?
 awaan u-**yaayiuh**
 who DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:PL**
 ‘Whose are these?’
 (Adult, A1.21, 3;00, 35:52)

- (67) (Name) aniyaayiuh.
 (name) an-**iyaayiuh**
 name DEM:DIST- **INAN:OBV:PL**
 ‘Those are (name)’s’
 (Adult, B3.11, 5;00, 01:59)

The question in (66) refers to a bunch of (grammatically inanimate) toys. In (67) the adult speaker refers to a set of toy handcuffs. The corresponding noun *mimaahchikwaapiskihiiikinh* ‘handcuffs’ is also inanimate and necessarily plural.

In summary, existing linguistic description of NE Cree tends to focus on nouns in possessive constructions. However, the frequency of equational constructions and expressions of possession in CDS generate many contexts where demonstratives signify possessives. Such examples from CDS illustrate how demonstratives encode crucial grammatical information pertaining to animacy, number, and obviation—often in the absence of a corresponding noun. We have shown that in many cases, the obviate marking for the demonstrative is

the only indication of a possessive relationship within an equational construction. This highlights the important role that demonstratives can play within NE Cree grammar in disambiguating syntax. Furthermore, examples from CDS show that demonstratives referring to inanimate possessees in possessor obviation inflect for not only plural number but also obviative status. In this sense demonstratives can specify more—and more precise—grammatical information than corresponding nouns in situations with interacting mechanics of person, possession, animacy, number, and obviation.

7.2. Obviative demonstratives agreeing with possessee nouns. This section further describes the implications of marking for demonstratives compared to nouns in possessor obviation. Existing description hints that demonstratives may play a special role in marking the obviative status of possessees, when other elements may not necessarily encode the same grammatical information.

The CDS sampled for this study contains 72 total tokens of demonstratives that agree with a noun as the possessee (table 5). A minority of these tokens (27/72, 37.50%) are proximate. This includes bare stems that encode distance while agreeing with the animacy of the noun. Such examples have no mismatch in the extent of obviative marking between demonstratives and nouns.

For instance, the demonstrative *uu* in (68) agrees with inanimate *akuhp* ‘coat’, and the demonstrative *an* in (69) agrees with animate *wiichaawaakin* ‘friend’, while no nominals have a suffix.

- (68) Naashch aah shiwaayihimaan uu chitikuhp.
 naashch aah shiwaayih-imaan **uu** chit=akuhp
 very.much PVB love_{TI} -SAP:SG>INAN_{CJ} **DEM:PXL** 2=coat
 ‘I love your coat.’

(Adult, B3.04, 4;06, 15:21)

- (69) Aaukw aa an chiwiichaawaakin?
 aaukw aa **an** chi=wiichaawaakin
 FOC Q **DEM:DIST** 2=friend
 ‘Is that your friend?’

(Adult, B1.05, 4;00, 19:13)

Only three proximate demonstrative tokens from table 5 agree with plural nouns. This includes inanimate *chimisinihiikinh* ‘your books’ in (70) and animate *chiwiichaawaakinich* ‘your friends’ in (71). These nominals all take suffixes that equally encode animacy, plurality, and proximate status.

- (70) Chichiih waapihtaan aa anihii kaa ashtaach-h chimisinihiikinh?
 chi=chiih-waapiht-aa an-**ihii** kaa
 2=PST-see_{TI} -SAP:SG>INAN_{IND} Q **DEM:DIST-INAN:PL** PVB

TABLE 5
ALL DEMONSTRATIVES AGREEING WITH A NOUN AS POSSESSEE

Distance	Stem	Animate		Inanimate		Total	
		Proximate Plural	Obviative	Proximate Plural	Obviative Singular		
Proximal	uu (5)	uchii (1)	uyaaah (2) uyaaayiuh (3)	uhii (0)	uyaaah (8) uyaaayiu (3)	uyaaah (3) uyaaayiuh (0)	25
Distal	an (16)	anichii (1)	aniyaah (15) aniyaayiuh (4)	anihii (1)	aniyaaah (6) aniyaayiu (0)	aniyaah (0) aniyaayiuh (1)	44
Total	21	2	24	1	17	4	69

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of tokens per type. Total refers to the number of tokens. No remote forms from CDS in the sample are obviative, so remote demonstratives are not included.

aashtaa-**chh** chi=*misinihiikin*-**h**
 sit.there_{II}-**PL**_{CJ} 2=*book*-**INAN:PL**
 ‘Do you see your books sitting there?’

(Adult, B1.03, 3;09, 07:11)

(71) Chiwiichaawaakinich aa anichii?
 chi=*wiichaawaakin*-**ich** aa an-**ichii**
 2=*friend*-**AN:PL** Q DEM:*DIST*-**AN:PL**
 ‘Are those your friends?’

(Adult, B1.20, 4;10, 38:02)

Example (70) is particularly telling, because three elements encode the inanimate and plural status of possessee *misinihiikin* ‘book’: the demonstrative suffix *-(i)hii*, noun suffix *-h*, and verb suffix *-chh*.

As table 5 indicates, however, most demonstratives that agree with possessee nouns are actually obviative (45/72, 62.5%) rather than proximate. All of these obviative demonstratives occur in possessor obviation. We describe examples of demonstratives from each relevant configuration of grammatical values.

First, all 24 animate obviative tokens in table 5 occur with nouns that must also be overtly marked obviative, as in (72–75). Additionally, the verb in (74) bears an animate obviative suffix agreeing with the status of the possessee.

(72) Awaan uyaah utaanishish-h?
 awaan u-**yaah** u=*taanish*-**ish-h**
 who DEM:*PXL*-**AN:OBV** 3=*daughter*-**DIM-AN:OBV**
 ‘Whose daughter is this?’

(Adult, A1.26, 3;04, 29:55)

(73) Awaan uyaayiu upiipiimish-h?
 awaan u-**yaayiu** u=*piipii*-**m-ish-h**
 who DEM:*PXL*-**AN:OBV** 3=*baby*-**POSS-DIM-AN:OBV**
 ‘Whose baby is this?’

(Adult, A1.06, 2;03, 01:52)

(74) Nuwich miyushiuih aniyaah uutaapaanaaskush-h.
 nuwich miyushi-**uih** an-**iyaah**
 very be.good_{AI}-**3:OBV**_{IND} DEM:*DIST*-**AN:OBV**
 u=*utaapaanaask*-**ush-h**
 3=*car/truck*-**DIM-AN:OBV**

‘His little truck is so nice.’

(Adult, B3.18, 5;10, 06:12)

- (75) Umis-h aniyaayih.
 u=mis-**h** an-**iyaayih**
 3=older.sister-**AN:OBV** DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘That’s her sister.’

(Adult, B3.18, 5;10, 19:53)

Agreement between animate demonstratives and nouns as possessees is straightforward, because both types of nominals carry overt suffixes when obviative. However, inanimate nominals present the possibility for important differences in marking: inanimate nouns as possessees in possessor obviation cannot bear an obviative suffix (5.2).

CDS contains 17 total demonstrative tokens agreeing with inanimate obviative singular nouns as possessees (table 5). Just three of these demonstratives co-occur with elements that also encode the obviative status of the possessee. In these constructions (76–78), the demonstrative and verb both provide morphological indications that the underlined noun possessee is actually obviative.

- (76) “Nuwich mishaayiu uyaa upiwaashikin” iish.
 nuwich mishaa-**yi** u-**yaa**
 very be.big_{II} -**OBV:SG**_{IND} DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG**
u=piywaashikin iish
3=sock 2:say_{IMP}
 ‘Say, “Her sock is so big.”’

(Adult, B1.04, 3;11, 53:03)

- (77) Uyaayiu uchiimaan aai ishinihkaataayiu ark.
 u-**yaayiu** u=chiimaan aai ishinihkaataa-**yi**
 DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG** 3=boat HES be.named_{II} -**OBV:SG**_{IND}
 ark
 ark
 ‘This is his boat . . . it’s called an “ark.”’

(Adult, B3.02, 4;05, 15:28)

- (78) Naashch aah miywaashiyich aniyaa utikuhp (name).
 naashch aah miywaashi-**yich** an-**iyaa**
 very.much PVB be.good_{II} -**OBV:SG**_{CR} DEM:DIST-**INAN:OBV:SG**
ut=akuhp (name)
3=coat name
 ‘(Name)’s coat is so nice.’

(Adult, B3.15, 5;05, 14:49)

In the remaining 14 constructions—all but one containing no verbs at all—the demonstrative provides the only overt clue that the possessee is actually obviative, as in (79–81).

- (79) Awaan uyaa umiichim?
 awaan u-**yaa** u=miichim
 who DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG** 3=food
 ‘Whose food is this?’
 (Adult, A1.30, 3;06, 23:23)

- (80) Awaan uyaayiu utikuhp?
 awaan u-**yaayiu** ut=akuhp
 who DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG** 3=coat
 ‘Whose coat is this?’
 (Adult, A1.26, 3;04, 29:07)

- (81) Awaan aniyaa unipaawin?
 awaan an-**iyaa** u=nipaawin
 who DEM:DIST-**INAN:OBV:SG** 3=bed
 ‘Whose bed is that?’
 (Adult, A1.35, 4;00, 24:15)

The single exception is (82), which is an especially interesting case, because it is one of the rare instances of an obviative possessor in CDS (Henke 2020).

- (82) Chiih michihaau aniyayiu aniyaa kiyipwaa umiichimiyiu.
 chiih michih-aa-u an-iyayiu
 PST make.dirty_{TA} -DIR-3:PROX:SG>3:OBV_{IND} DEM:DIST-AN:OBV
 an-**iyaa** kiyipwaa u=miichim-iyiu
 DEM:DIST-**INAN:OBV:SG** of.course 3=food-OBV:PSR
 ‘She_i (PROX) made her_j (OBV) dirty with her_j (OBV) food (OBV).’
 (Adult, A1.35, 4;00, 24:15)

This sentence entails three third-person entities: subject ‘she’, object ‘her’, and the instrument possessee ‘food’. The subject is proximate, which renders the object obviative. The subject is indexed only by the verb, while the object is indexed by the verb as well as the animate obviative demonstrative form *aniyaayiu*. The instrument possessee *miichim* ‘food’ is required to be obviative because it has a third-person possessor. Due to the rules of possessor obviation, though, it cannot bear an inanimate singular obviative suffix, because it is inanimate. The *-iyiu* suffix instead indexes the obviative possessor. This leaves the adnominal demonstrative *aniyaa* as the only clue that the possessee is itself

obviative, despite the otherwise rich marking of person, animacy, number, and obviation throughout other elements in the sentence.

Lastly, CDS contains four tokens of inanimate obviative plural demonstratives agreeing with possessee nouns (table 5). Such nouns can bear a plural suffix but not obviative marking. In example (83) both the demonstrative and the verb encode the obviative status of the inanimate plural *umisinihiikinh* ‘her books’.

- (83) Naashch aah miywaashiyich-h uyaah umisinihiikinh.
 naashch aah miywaashi-**yichh** u-**yaah**
 very.much PVB be.good_{II} -**OBV:PL**_{CJ} DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:PL**
u=umisinihiikin-h
3=book-INAN:PL
 ‘Her books here are so nice.’

(Adult, A1.08, 2;04, 37:50)

In the remaining three constructions (84–86), however, the demonstrative once again serves as the only element overtly encoding the obviative status of the possessee.

The null-copula construction (84) employs no verb, so the demonstrative provides the clue that the possessee *mischisinh* ‘shoes’ is actually obviative.

- (84) Awaan uyaah umischisinh?
 awaan u-**yaah** u=mischisin-h
 who DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:PL** 3=shoe-INAN:PL
 ‘Whose shoes are these?’

(Adult, A1.09, 2;05, 02:00)

The verb stem *piihtaasuu* ‘s/he puts, loads (things into containers)’ in (85) belongs to a class of verbs that agree only with the animate subject. The inflectional form of the verb stem in (85) also involves changing the quality of the first vowel through a process known as initial change.

- (85) Paahtaasuyich-h Santa Claus-h aniyaayiuw uwiikwaayaamiwaahch.
 paahtaasu-yichh Santa.Claus-h an-**iyaayiuh**
 fill_{AI} -3:OBV_{CJ} name-AN:OBV DEM:DIST-**INAN:OBV:PL**
u=wiihkwaayaa-m-iwaa-hch
3=sock-POSS-2/3PL-LOC
 ‘Santa Claus put something in their stockings.’

(Adult, B3.04, 4;06, 33:25)

Therefore, no verbal marking in (85) indexes the presence or grammatical features of an inanimate object. This leaves only the demonstrative to encode the

TABLE 6
 TOKENS OF OBVIATIVE DEMONSTRATIVE VARIANTS PER GRAMMATICAL VALUES

Variant	Proximal			Distal			Total
	AN:OBV	INAN:OBV:SG	INAN:OBV:PL	AN:OBV	INAN:OBV:SG	INAN:OBV:PL	
Long	15	37	8	31	34	9	134
Short	17	32	11	39	68	13	180
Total	32	69	19	70	102	22	314

TABLE 7
 TOKENS OF OBLVIATIVE DEMONSTRATIVE VARIANTS PER FUNCTION

Variant	Function		
	Pronominal	Adnominal	Equational
Long	51 (0.35)	8 (0.14)	75 (0.69)
Short	95 (0.65)	51 (0.86)	34 (0.31)
Total	146 (1.00)	59 (1.00)	109 (1.00)

Note: Proportions are provided in parentheses.

For easier visualization, table 6 tallies all obviative demonstrative tokens organized by long and short variants per relevant configuration of grammatical values.

Table 6 allows us to extrapolate some telling patterns. First, no blanket preference exists in NE Cree CDS for long over short variants, contra anecdotal reports from existing description. In fact, short forms outnumber long forms in overall tokens (180 to 134) as well as in each possible configuration of grammatical values except proximal inanimate singular.

However, a preference between variants does emerge when considering the three different primary functions of demonstratives as adnominal, pronominal, and equational elements (5.1). Table 7 calculates short and long variants in CDS per each of these functions. In this light, the usage of particular demonstrative variants seems tied at least in some part to function. We now explore variants performing each function, where many examples testify to the high proportion of questions in NE Cree CDS.

First, short variants (87–88) are strongly preferred for **pronominal** functions, where they are used in CDS at nearly twice the rate as long variants (89–90).

- (87) Awaan kaa miyisk aniyaah?
 awaan kaa miy-isk an-**iyaah**
 who PVB give_{TA}-3SG>2SG_{CJ} DEM:DIST-**AN:OBV**
 ‘Who gave you that?’

(Adult, A1.35, 4;00, 09:15)

- (88) (Name) waash uyaa nichiih ushihtimuwaau.
 (name) waash u-**yaa**
 name EMPH DEM:PXL-**INAN:OBV:SG**
 ni=chiih-ushihtim-uw-aa-u
 I=PST-make_{TI}-APPL-DIR-1SG>3SG_{IND}
 ‘I made this for (name).’

(Adult, B3.09, 4;10, 14:54)

- (89) Aw nuwich miyushi^hiyuh aniyaay^hiyuh.
 aw nuwich miyushi-yiuh an-**iyaay^hiyuh**
 INTJ very be.good_{AI}-3:OBV_{IND} DEM:DIST-AN:OBV
 ‘Aw, that one is nice.’
 (Adult, B3.04, 4;06, 03:13)

- (90) Oh nuwich miywaashiyu uyaay^hiyu.
 oh nuwich miywaashi-yiu u-**yaay^hiyu**
 INTJ very be.good_{II}-OBV:SG_{IND} DEM:PXL-INAN:OBV:SG
 ‘Oh, this is pretty.’
 (Adult, A1.06, 2;03, 22:07)

In **adnominal** contexts, CDS evinces an extremely strong preference for short variants (91–92), where they are used at more than six times the rate of long variants (93–94).

- (91) Awaan uyaah utaanishish-h?
 awaan u-**yaah** u=taanish-ish-h
 who DEM:PXL-AN:OBV 3=daughter-DIM-AN:OBV
 ‘Whose daughter is this?’ (literally, ‘Whose is this daughter?’)
 (Adult, A1.26, 3;04, 29:55)

- (92) Awaan uyaa utahtipiwin?
 awaan u-**yaah** u=tahtipiwin
 who DEM:PXL-INAN:OBV:SG 3=chair
 ‘Whose chair is this?’
 (Adult, A1.17, 2;09, 38:08)

- (93) Awaan uyaay^hiyuh upiipimish-h?
 awaan u-**yaay^hiyuh** u=piipii-m-ish-h
 who DEM:PXL-AN:OBV 3=baby-POSS-DIM-AN:OBV
 ‘Whose baby is this?’
 (Adult, A1.06, 2;03, 01:52)

- (94) Awaan uyaay^hiyu utikuhp?
 awaan u-**yaay^hiyu** ut=akuhp
 who DEM:PXL-INAN:OBV:SG 3=coat
 ‘Whose coat is this?’
 (Adult, A1.26, 3;04, 29:07)

In fact, the sample contains no tokens of long variants *aniyaay^hiyu*, *aniyaay^hiyuh*, or *uyaay^hiyuh* functioning as adnominals.

Finally, CDS shows a strong preference for long (97–98) over short variants (95–96) only for **equational** functions, where long variants occur at more than twice the rate of short variants.

- (95) Chishaayaakwh aniyaah, nimaa?
 chishaayaakw-h an-**iyaa** nimaa
 bear-AN:OBV DEM:DIST-AN:OBV NEG
 ‘That is a bear, right?’
 (Adult, A1.06, 2;03, 20:15)
- (96) Chaakwaayiu aniyaa?
 chaakwa-yiu an-**iyaa**
 what-INAN:OBV:SG DEM:DIST-INAN:OBV:SG
 ‘What is that?’
 (Adult, A1.30, 3;06, 12:48)
- (97) Chishaayaakwh aniyaayiuh, nimaa?
 chishaayaakw-h an-**iyaayiuh** nimaa
 bear-AN:OBV DEM:DIST-AN:OBV NEG
 ‘That is a bear, eh?’
 (Adult, A1.06, 2;03, 30:06)
- (98) Chaakwaayiu aniyaayiu?
 chaakwa-yiu an-**iyaayiu**
 what-INAN:OBV:SG DEM:DIST-INAN:OBV:SG
 ‘What is that?’
 (Adult, A1.06, 2;03, 07:06)

In summary, we have drawn from CDS to provide the first dedicated analysis of variation between obviative forms within the rich NE Cree demonstrative paradigm. The CDS analyzed by this study employs more than 300 obviative demonstrative tokens (table 3) across two types of variant forms, “long” and “short.” CDS evinces no blanket preference for long over short variants, which challenges expectations from previous, anecdotal linguistic description. Furthermore, the usage of each variant form does not seem to hinge clearly on grammatical features such as distance, animacy, or number. Instead, large imbalances between variant forms emerge in light of three major morphosyntactic functions that demonstratives perform. Short variants are heavily favored for pronominal and adnominal functions, while long versions are strongly favored only in equational constructions.

These observations are based on a small sample size, so more research is needed to explore and explain demonstrative variation further, particularly in adult-level speech. For example, variation may relate to the length of a noun

phrase, since adnominal demonstratives—which co-occur with a noun—are overwhelmingly short. The position of a demonstrative within a clause or constituent may matter as well. Nonetheless, the examples in 7.3 demonstrate how examining CDS can challenge existing anecdotal claims while advancing and enhancing linguistic description.

8. Conclusion and discussion. We have shown how considering CDS can contribute novel and expanded descriptive insight into the morphosyntax of NE Cree. Obviation is a quintessential linguistic characteristic of Algonquian languages, and previous linguistic description has only hinted at the crucial role that the expansive demonstrative paradigm plays in encoding obviation within NE Cree. By examining more than 1,700 tokens of demonstratives from CDS, we are able to shed new and detailed light on how demonstratives encode obviation as well as on the morphosyntactic conditions that may influence variation within the set of obviative demonstrative word forms.

As the examples throughout this study show, the properties of CDS in NE Cree position this genre to reveal morphosyntactic facets of the language that may not be as frequent or readily apparent in adult-level speech. These properties include a preponderance of equational constructions and discussions of possession, which frequently recruit demonstratives to signify interacting categories of animacy, number, and obviation—very often in contexts where verbs and nouns do not overtly encode the same grammatical information.

This case study also lays the groundwork for further research on the linguistic properties of CDS in NE Cree, which could contribute new findings to enrich grammatical description of the language. For example, no dedicated analysis has yet deeply and systematically compared a corpus of adult-level speech in NE Cree to the CDS represented in the CCLAS corpus, which could flesh out additional linguistic differences between the two genres. Caregivers have been known to adapt CDS to the developmental levels of children (e.g., Sokolov 1993), and future work could investigate how the linguistic properties of CDS may differ throughout the CCLAS corpus. More research is also needed to examine the properties of CDS from additional caregivers not represented in the CCLAS corpus, particularly across different generations and in other Eeyou Istchee communities. Much potential remains, especially as more and more Indigenous communities in North America work to create new generations of speakers for their languages, and we look forward to others joining the conversation about the value of documenting and describing CDS.

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