

Animacy & Topicality on a Scale of Cultural Context

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Abstract

What is animacy? Animacy is literally the “cognitive distinction between animate and inanimate, and . . . human and non-human” (Yamamoto 1999). However, linguistically and for the purposes of this paper, animacy hierarchy in language is defined by Thomas Payne as “a hierarchy of agent-worthiness (or by extension topic-worthiness [...] [which] is not grammaticalized in any given language, but neither is it a theoretical model based on a pre-empirical notion of ‘agent-worthiness.’ Rather, it derives from a survey of languages that rely, at least partially, on pragmatics to distinguish [Agent] from [Patient]” (Payne 1997). In this paper I will support Payne’s definition of animacy, and his notion that animacies in language always function from left to right (higher to lower animacy) in regards to agency and topic, unless grammatically marked. In other words, an entity of lower animacy will never act upon an entity of higher animacy because it defies this order, unless there is a specific method to grammatically mark this change. I also argue that there is a spectrum of animacy in language, ranging from those languages in which it is disregarded and not grammatically manifested, to those in which it is so closely bound to cultural contexts that it necessitates grammatical markedness. To explore this latter end of the scale, I will discuss at length the elaborate Navajo animacy hierarchy and its inextricability from Navajo religion and worldview. I will then use Japanese and Hindi to demonstrate their intermediary position on the scale of animacy’s influence in grammar. These three languages provide examples of different ways of connoting animacy, from word order, to affixes, to verbal morphology, as well as different ways of defining its animacy hierarchy. These categories, differentiating “animate” from “inanimate” and all levels in between, do not represent one universal worldview, but rather reflect the views of individual cultures and thus are manifested differently in each language.

Introduction¹

Animacy in linguistics is a constantly fluctuating concept that has been reexamined, reinterpreted, and redefined in recent years, in attempts to encompass the many ways in which it manifests itself formally in language. Linguistically, animacy is seen on a spectrum with a left to right (higher to lower) classification; Thomas Payne describes this scale as “a hierarchy of agent-worthiness (or by extension topic-worthiness [...] This entire hierarchy is not grammaticalized in any given language, but neither is it

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a theoretical model based on a pre-empirical notion of ‘agent-worthiness.’ Rather, it derives from a survey of languages that rely, at least partially, on pragmatics to distinguish [Agent] from [Patient]” (Payne 1997). In other words, Payne emphasizes the significance of pragmatics or contexts that vary from language to language, rather than a uniform system that formalizes animacy in one way across all languages. Payne goes on to say that in all languages surveyed thus far, animacy follows the same pattern, in which the argument occurring farthest left (highest) on the hierarchy will be determined as the topic. Payne’s notion of arguments lower on the hierarchy being unable to act upon higher arguments is congruent with and upheld by the formalizations found in Navajo, Japanese, and Hindi. Throughout this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate the manifestation of animacy among a selection of languages through the lens of Thomas Payne’s notion that an animacy hierarchy will always rule higher to lower, meaning that an entity that is higher in the hierarchy will be necessitated as the topic in comparison to an entity that is lower on the hierarchy. Therefore, if a noun that is of lower rank in animacy functions as the topic of a sentence, there must be some sort of grammatical marking or change to indicate the conditions as such.

Not all languages deal with animacy in regards to cultural contexts or even deal with animacy at all, meaning hierarchies and categories do not have precedence when determining formalized grammar. I posit that there is a spectrum in which animacy hierarchies exist; on one end are languages, such as Navajo, where the linguistic manifestations of animacy cannot be understood without also an understanding of its culture and worldview, and therefore animacy is heavily marked. On the other end of the scale exist languages, such as Hindi, that have a limited regard for animacy where it is

marked purely grammatically, leaving a range in between these two extremes in which languages, such as Japanese, only deal with animacy to a certain extent, such as for the purposes of topicalization, and therefore have limited ways in which it is grammatically marked. In other words, these grammatical manifestations may either be influenced by a specific worldview and unique their respective cultures, or the grammatical signs of animacy may not necessarily influenced by culture, but only formalized in language through morphosyntactic changes.

Definitions and Concepts of Animacy

In a more literal sense, animacy refers to the “liveness,” agency, and/or sentience of a noun, and how these characteristics affect grammar (Chen 2012). The divergence then comes from what is meant by “liveness,” as it is often not a simple dichotomy between alive and not alive. *Animacy*, used linguistically or otherwise, has not yet appeared in English dictionaries, while its adjectival representation, *animate*, is defined as “possessing or characterized by life” (Merriam-Webster.com). The abstraction of “animacy” perhaps remains undefined because of the vast number of interpretations and degrees of sentiency and liveness across language.

Thus, “animacy” itself can sometimes be considered a misnomer for its role in linguistics, as it can stray from the biological sense of the word, as strictly being alive versus inanimate. Instead, linguistically, its meaning and defining categories vary from language to language. In some cases, animacy describes how an entity’s agency and freedom to act upon its environment is embodied within a language, based on this entity’s inherent characteristics. Yamamoto (1999) emphasizes that animacy as expressed in language is not simply a dichotomy, but is rather hierarchical. Therefore, the term is not

interpreted as precisely as living or not living. It is also defined in terms of consciousness, agency, and empathy; empathy here being read as an egocentric level of relatedness to humans. This egocentricity of the speaker, or the assumption that the speaker is human, is common across all languages in regards to animacy, meaning that the more human an entity is, the higher its animacy.

One lens in which to view animacy is Anna Wierzbicka's notion of ethnosyntax (Wierzbicka 1979), and the concept that language encodes for more than just culture-based semantic content, but culture-based grammar as well. Wierzbicka, who coined the term 'ethnosyntax,' claims that "every language embodies in its very structure a certain world view" (Wierzbicka 1979). Her analysis of the connections between grammar and culture is relevant and useful when examining some examples of animacy. However, in other examples, animacy is not the mode in which these cultural connections are formalized, even though cultural factors may be linguistically expressed in other ways. Recent scholarship has avoided using her exact notion of ethnosyntax because the claim is so absolute in its suggestion that every language exemplifies some form of ethnosyntax; however a new definition of ethnosyntax has been developed to suggest that it is "the study of connections between the cultural knowledge, attitudes, and practices of speakers, and the morphosyntactic resources that employ in speech" (Enfield 2004). Therefore, although this paper will use the aspect of Wierzbicka's argument that states language and embodies culture and worldview, it will not use animacy in supporting the aspect of her argument that claims culture-based language is universal.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or linguistic relativity, is another theory that can apply to animacy, and states "that human languages determine the structure of the real

world as perceived by human beings, rather than vice versa, and that this structure is different and incommensurable from one language to another” (Collins English Dictionary 2003). Although largely contested, reduced, and limited since its initial proposition (Boroditsky 2002, Levinson 2000), it will be another critical tool in the investigation of animacy, especially in regards to Navajo. Harry Hoijer, a student of Edward Sapir, coined the name of this hypothesis, and was himself a researcher of Athabaskan languages, therefore fully immersed in a prime example of the extent to which language impacts thought, culture, and worldview (Hoijer 1971). The hypothesis essentially posits that the structure of language will inevitably necessitate and shape how its speakers conceptualize the world (Swoyer 2011). In this paper’s study of Navajo, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis seems to have some explanatory force in connecting language to their respective cultures. This hypothesis and Wierzbicka’s have different ideas concerning whether culture and worldview shapes language or vice versa, however both arguments uphold the notions that some elements of grammar cannot be explained without some cultural context.

However, there are some examples of animacy in which language and culture are not explicitly related, such as Japanese and Hindi. These cases are not meant to disprove or argue against the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, nor Wierzbicka’s concept of ethnosyntax, because cultural connections shown in these languages may be demonstrated in methods other than animacy. Japanese and Hindi will still be excellent examples of the different effects animacy can have through morphosyntactic variations on language, and also show that there are different notions of how categories should be defined.

In this paper, the animacy in Navajo will be the system I explore to the greatest extent and use to illustrate how language and culture are inexorably bound and display symbiotic effects on each other. Navajo will therefore demonstrate why the same entities can be determined as both animate and inanimate, depending on the cultural conceptualization of the world in each language; for example what aspects of cultural beliefs make “lightning” in Navajo is considered to be the highest on the animacy scale whereas in other languages it may be interpreted as inanimate. It is crucial to disassociate these entities from the biological dichotomous interpretations and definitions of animacy as living and nonliving, and rather understand them culturally and contextually. In the case of Navajo, the religious and spiritual beliefs of its people are the cultural factors that contribute in shaping animacy, which will largely be illustrated by Gary Witherspoon’s *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (1977). Witherspoon’s text is largely substantiated by native informants, for example, his wife, a native speaker. In the other category of animacy expression, I will use Japanese to show that grammatical manifestations of animacy are not necessarily purely governed by cultural influences, but are still concerned with the pragmatics of topicalization, and therefore rather fall intermediately on the cline of how animacy is expressed in language, having fewer morphosyntactic markings. I will then briefly discuss how Hindi uses animacy purely at the grammatical level. At the same time, all three of these languages follow Payne’s model of animacy, in that entities of higher animacies will be treated as the topic before any other nouns in the sentence, and if a lower animate noun functions as the topic, there must be a grammatical indication.

1. Navajo

The Navajo worldview is shaped by the belief that “thought” (*sa’ah naagháii*) is inextricable from and symbiotic to its outer form of “speech” (*bik’eh hózhó*) (Witherspoon 1977). The animacy hierarchy of nouns in Navajo is extremely specific to this Athabaskan Native American language, and its structure is inextricable from the Navajo religion and belief system. Organisms, objects, and abstractions have inherent characteristics based on the world perspective of the culture, and thus confer specific statuses upon nouns in the lexicon. The figure below attempts to illustrate basic relationships between inner and outer expressions of thought, knowledge, language, and speech.

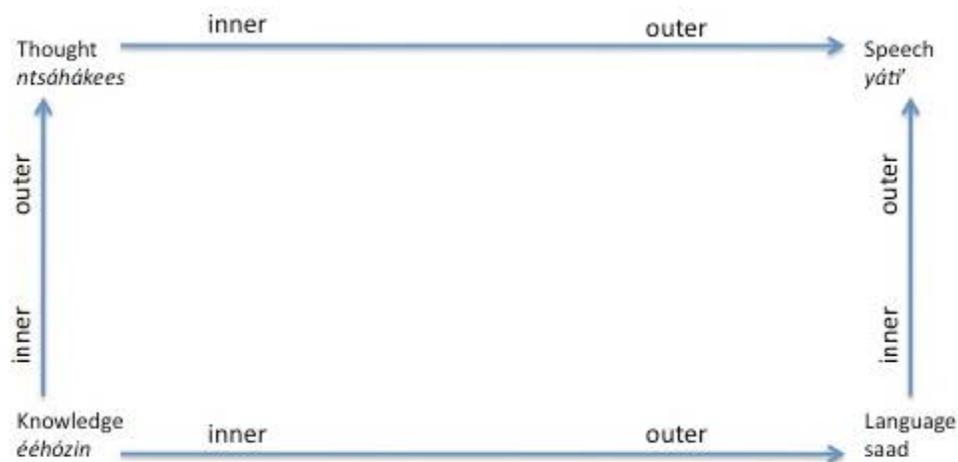


Figure 1: Structural Relationship among Knowledge, Language, Thought, and Speech

(Witherspoon 1977)

From this structure, one can see how in Navajo ritual and belief, all things begin with knowledge and are codified and externalized by speech. Knowledge yields both thought

and language, while thought and language produce speech. Knowledge, for the Navajo, is synonymous with Creation and their religious doctrine. According to the legend, the world was created by the *Diyin Dine'é*, “Gods” or “Holy People” and was *thought* into existence (Witherspoon 1977). These thoughts were then actualized into speech and ritual. The figure is representative of their worldview that knowledge is the inner form of thought and language, while thought and language are the inner forms of speech, and thus Navajo culture is innately bound to language expression.

According to Navajo mythology, the Creation story, *Diné Bahané*, there are four worlds that precede this present fifth world: the first known as *saad la'i* or “first language,” the second as *saad naakii* or “second language,” the third as *saad tqaa* or “third language” and finally *saad dii*, or “fourth language” (Witherspoon 1977).² The story also involves First Man, *Sa'ah Naaghaii*, or the one associated with thought, and First Woman, *Bik'eh Hózhó*, the one who represents language (Witherspoon 1977). Witherspoon describes these two entities as “the sources of animation and life for the inner forms of all living beings,” and therefore necessitates examining the relationship between Navajo religion and the structure of their language. The notion that Creation is the manifestation of thought and eventually language contextualizes and is exactly parallel to the patterns of animacy in the Navajo language.

Another perception of Navajo culture that plays a role in determining the language's animacy hierarchy is the belief that air is the most essential, worshipped, and respected element of life (Witherspoon 1977). It is omnipresent and necessary for all living things, but more importantly, in this case it establishes the connection between

² Witherspoon notes that some informants have described a further breakdown into twelve worlds

knowledge and speech, this critical relationship that is discussed above. The Navajo recognize that sound is the movement of air, and therefore speech is the extremely sophisticated and systematic movement of air (Witherspoon 1977). Thus, air is the vehicle that translates knowledge and thought into speech. The degree of ability to manipulate air in this way is reflected in the animacy hierarchy: humans, at the top of the hierarchy (after “supernaturals,” which will be discussed later) use air in the most refined and articulated way to create speech, whereas animals come next in the order because they also use air to create sound, although in a slightly less advanced way than speech, and finally comes unspeaking or “inanimate” objects. This same notion of air and speech impacts the hierarchy within the category of humans, as infants are classified lower than adult humans due to their inability to speak. Thus, humans obtain their humanness by means of language.

The categorization and hierarchy of nouns in Navajo is best identified as:

Supernatural/Natural Phenomena → Adult Human → Child → Infant → Large Animal → Small Animal → Insect → Inanimate → Abstractions (Perkins 1978)

Another way to categorize and breakdown noun animacy in the Navajo language is to first separate inanimates into corporeal and incorporeal and animates into speakers and callers (Witherspoon 1977). Incorporeal inanimates, labeled on the hierarchy above as “abstractions,” are entities such as hunger, health, happiness, etc., while corporeal inanimates are what one usually considers inanimate objects, such as a table, a book, etc. Within the realm of inanimate, corporeal entities, as shown in the hierarchy above, are ranked higher on the scale than incorporeal. Thus, in Navajo, it would be absurd to say “Thirst killed the tree,” but rather instead, “The tree allowed itself to die as a result of

thirst” (Witherspoon 1977). As for animates, “speakers” are considered humans, or ones who can articulate language, while “callers” are animals, who also produce sound but not in a sophisticated and specific way. In other words, a human is differentiated by other living things as *yálti’i*, or “one who speaks,” while animals and plants are either characterized as being *’ndijih* “by which it breathes” and being *naxa’ná*, “by which it moves,” respectively (Haile 1964).

There are both semantic and syntactic implications that are derived from this systematic grouping which this paper will later explore. An explanation for ‘supernaturals,’ (sun, moon, thunder, clouds, rain, sky), appearing at the top of the animacy hierarchy can be found in Berard Haile’s research (1964), as he describes the innate personification of these sacred entities. The concept of inner and outer as a duality embodied by one entity, as we have seen above with knowledge, speech, language, and thought, is also represented in these natural phenomena. Their inner form is known as *bi’gistin*, or “one who lies within it,” meaning that they have a soul, and are in this sense of equal animacy to humans (Haile 1964). What elevates them to a superhuman level is then their outer form, as they are not human and also appeared first in the worlds described in the Creation story.

The natural phenomena that appear at the very top of the hierarchy are entities that are thought to have this ‘inner form’ as mentioned by Witherspoon 1977 and earlier in this paper. In Navajo, they are referred to as *bii’asti*, “an animate being lies within,” which stems from the events in the Creation Story where these natural phenomena were given the first and most prominent roles in the Navajo universe. These natural

phenomena are thus considered to be more animate than even humans because they are perceived as embodying souls that existed first and gave life to humans.

In her article “Ranking in Navajo Nouns,” Mary Helen Creamer, a native speaker of Navajo, reiterates the importance of worldview in shaping formalizations of the language. For example, it is irrefutable to Navajo speakers, both grammatically and logically in the worldview, that a bee can sting a spider and not a mouse, but rather the mouse can only allow itself to be stung by the bee (Creamer 1974). In other cases, Navajo is interpretive and flexible within each category of animacy, which accounts for some variation in the scale and what is spoken. This is particularly the case when the nouns within a sentence have equal status, and it is left up to the speaker to determine the word order, so that he puts the noun in initial position that he favors or wishes to emphasize. For example, it is acceptable linguistically and logically to Navajo speakers for both a dog to bite a cat and a cat to bite a dog (Witherspoon 1977). Ellavina Perkins, a linguist and native speaker, elaborates on the potential leniency in the interpretation of rank, such as domesticity of animals ranking higher than wild ones, smaller animals displaying unusual strength transcending to a higher rank, as well as the ambiguity of cognition in an infant in determining when he is ranked the same as humans (Perkins 1978). Creamer’s article offers an additional semantic interpretation for why nouns appear in certain categories. She states that, generally, these nouns are grouped by and then ranked in order of “capacity to act upon in relation to other beings,” thus paralleling Navajo’s cultural theory of animacy, in terms of what is considered to be the most topic-worthy, to the general and formal theory of animacy as discussed previously by Payne.

1.1 Word Order

The ranking of these nouns within the animacy hierarchy is responsible for a strict word order within sentences. Essentially, the noun phrase with higher ranking will appear in initial position and adjust the form of its verb accordingly. Generally, Navajo is a SOV language, however the rules and implications of animacy allow for the inversion of subject and object (Perkins 1978). The following sentences will show grammaticality versus ungrammaticality based on different levels of animacy and the effect on word order.

(1) *Awéé' chí'í diné yiztał.
 baby man kicked
 'The baby kicked the man.'

(2) Diné awéé' chí'í biztał.
 Man baby was kicked
 'The man was kicked by the baby.' (Perkins 1978)

Example (1) is shown to be ungrammatical with 'baby' appearing first in the sentence, as it is ranked lower on the animacy scale than 'man.' Example (2) shows the correct word order for the animacy hierarchy agreement and also expresses the change with a different form of the verb, which will be discussed later. Essentially, an argument that possesses a higher animacy will always precede an argument with lower animacy (Yamamoto 1999). Witherspoon explains that in the Navajo conception of the world, human beings are more intelligent than horses and therefore horses cannot act upon humans; not only would a sentence which violates the animacy conditions be ungrammatical, but the entire meaning would be an "impossibility" (Witherspoon 1977).

The following examples demonstrate nouns of the same category and the interchangeability of their position within the sentence.

(3) Mósí tazhii yinoolchééł.
 Cat turkey chasing
 ‘The cat is chasing the turkey.’

(4) Tazchii mósí binoolchééł.
 Turkey cat being chased
 ‘The turkey is being chased by the cat.’ (Perkins 1978)

Because the two nouns in examples (3) and (4), “cat” and “turkey” are ranked the same on the scale of animacy, they are flexible in regards to word order and can both be in either subject or object position and still maintain the same sentence meaning.

The examples below show animacy ranked by movement, and the objects’ abilities to act upon each other. They will show that the moving noun is necessarily higher in animacy than the unmoving object and will therefore appear first in the sentence.

(5) Tsé t’iis yik’i ch’ímíááz.
 Rock tree rolled upon
 ‘The rock rolled upon the tree.’

(6) *T’iis tsé bik’i ch’ínímááz.
 Tree rock rolled upon
 ‘The tree was rolled upon by the rock.’

(7) T’iis tsé yik’iikééz.
 Tree rock on fell
 ‘The tree fell on the rock.’

(8) *Tse t’iis bik’iikééz
 rock tree on fell (Perkins 1978)

Because ‘tree’ and ‘rock’ are not distinguishable from each other on the animacy hierarchy, one must instead turn to a generalization made by Creamer, stating that further

rankings may be determined by how one would “expect [nouns] to interact with each other” (1974). Therefore, the correct grammatical construction of example (5) shows “rock” in initial position because it is moving and is acting upon the tree. Meanwhile, example (7) proves to be grammatical even with tree in subject position, because it is the entity with locomotion, while example (8) is ungrammatical with rock in subject position, further demonstrating that the context and semantics of the sentence determine word order in addition to animacy. This pattern also harkens back to the unique Navajo concept of the connection between thought and speech; actions, movements, and behaviors are thought to be externalizations and actualizations of thought. Movement and speech to the Navajo tend to imply a higher level of animacy. Witherspoon posits that life and movement are synonymous in Navajo culture, and because moving entities, as seen in the examples above, appear before unmoving nouns in the word order of sentences, one can conclude that movement is another category that impacts the scale of animacy. Movement is a characteristic of thought, which supports the way in which the Navajo worldview shapes its animacy hierarchy by thought. (Witherspoon 1977). Therefore there are additional cultural factors besides Navajo religion, such as this perception of movement, that also impact noun ranking.

The linguistic formalization of word order has a critical relationship to another morphosyntactic marking, which is discussed in the following section. It is crucial to note that following or breaking the rules of animacy in Navajo is not simply a question of grammaticality versus ungrammaticality, but it also maintains logical (to Navajo speakers) sentences, common sense, and inherent beliefs.

1.2 *yi-/bi-* Alternation

Verbal morphology is the other significant linguistic manifestation of the animacy hierarchy in Navajo. The necessity of the prefixes *yi-* and *bi-*, 3rd person markers, are demonstrated in Perkins (1978) and show the prefixes' alternations on the verb of the sentence corresponding to subject object inversion. There have been a variety of discussions as to what these affixes actually do to the sentence, however it is clear that the alternation responds to the rules of animacy. One argument is that *yi-* is a direct marker while *bi-* is an inverse marker (Yamamoto 1999). This is true when there are both animate and inanimate entities within a sentence, rather than just animate or just inanimate arguments.

The prefixes do not exactly delineate between active versus passive sentences in terms of an attempt at an English translation, although this was the explanation first posited by Berard Hale's extensive research (1964), and similarly, they are represented as such by the English translations in this paper. As seen in the examples below in regards to the discussion of voice, the agent is topicalized in the direct voice while the patient is topicalized in the inverse, which is why the English passive is typically the gloss (Karimi 2003).

Instead, the affix alternation is better understood by interpreting their pattern through the Topic/Focus structure. Perkins describes the *bi-* prefix as a topicalizing device or an emphatic marker (Perkins 1978). Her description of animacy in this way perfectly fits within our original formal definition of animacy from Payne (1997), paralleling the left to right direction of the hierarchy with topic-worthiness. Karimi (2003) further describes it as a direct/inverse voice alternation, and states that in the

direct voice, “the third person *yi-* pronoun marks an ordinary focused object” while with inverse voice, “the third person *bi-* pronoun marks a topicalized object.” For example,

(9) *yiztał*
 3OBJ-3SUBJ-kicked
 Focus-Topic-V
 ‘He kicked it.’

(10) *biztał*
 3OBJ-3SUBJ-kicked
 Topic-Focus-V
 ‘He was kicked by it.’

Karimi (2003)

Example (9) shows the direct voice, while (10) shows the inverse. In this way, word order must necessarily reflect the animacy hierarchy in Navajo, because of the requirement for higher-ranked entities to be topicalized.

To demonstrate some of the grammatical manifestations that are caused this topic/animacy relationship, the following examples show the alternation of the verbal *yi-*/*bi-* prefix and the ways it maintains grammaticality, as well as an instance of when it is following syntactic rules but is still unacceptable in the Navajo worldview.

(11) *At’éeéd tó yoodláá.*’
 Girl water drank
 ‘The girl drank the water.’

(12) **At’éeéd tó boodláá.*’
 Girl water drank
 ‘The girl drank the water.’

(13) *Tó at’éeéd boodláá*’
 water girl drank
 *‘The water was drunk by the girl.’

(Witherspoon 1977)

Example (11) is both grammatical and acceptable in the Navajo view of the world. The *y[i]*- prefix on the verb “to drink” correctly corresponds with the animate subject of the sentence, “girl.” In example (12), although the word order is correct according to the animacy hierarchy, with *at'ééd* “girl” preceding *tó* “water,” the *b[i]*- prefix on the verb is ungrammatical because the subject of the sentence is still more animate than the object, thus necessitating the *yi*- prefix instead. Finally, example (13) roughly translates to “The water was drunk by the girl,” and although the verbal prefix *bi*- correctly corresponds with the less animate subject, “water,” the construction of the sentence with “water” appearing first suggests an impossibility in Navajo language and universe, according to Gary Witherspoon’s informants. To Navajo speakers, this would imply that water possesses more intelligence than the girl and thus had the girl drink it, perhaps, as Witherspoon offers, would more closely yield an English translation of “The water let the girl drink it” (Witherspoon 1977). It is incomprehensible to give the water agency in either case, but especially in regards to the Navajo worldview which structures its thought and language based on this animacy ranking.

Using examples (5) through (8) above, one will notice that *bi*- is not the grammatically correct affix on the verb, because it attributes to the topic the capacity to think. Therefore, not only does word order play a significant role in formalizing animacy in the language, but verbs must also be marked to correspond with the hierarchy. Sentences (6) and (8) are ungrammatical because *bi*- giving the noun phrases topic-worthiness would defy Payne’s definition of left to right animacy hierarchy.

Perkins notes an additional pattern of the *yi*-/*bi*- alternation in sentences with postpositional phrases. In these cases, particularly postpositions describing location and

direction, the prefix instead attaches to the postposition itself, rather than the main verb, and is dependent upon the animacy or inanimacy of the subject nominal (Perkins 1978).

(14a) Mási tsásk'eh yikáá' alhosh.
 Cat bed top sleeps
 'The cat is sleeping on the bed.'

(14b) *Mási tsásk'eh bikáá' alhosh.
 Cat bed top sleeps

(14c) * Tsásk'eh mási bikáá' alhosh. (Perkins 1978)
 Bed cat top sleeps

Example (14a) is the only grammatical sentence in this data set, because it both adheres to the rules of the animacy hierarchy in terms of word order, and uses the correct third person pronoun, *yí-*, on the postposition, marking the animate subject.

Navajo, as the primary language in this study, has shown to have an extensive and elaborate method of incorporating a complex animacy hierarchy into the formal grammar and culture. Because of this, it appears on the one far end of the spectrum that I am proposing, as a language that is richly connected to and manifested in a particular worldview and relationship to objects in a belief system.

2. Japanese

The manifestations of animacy in Japanese, both grammatically and culturally, is not nearly as extensive as we have seen in Navajo. Instead, this language classifies animate nouns as including humans and animals, while inanimate nouns include objects and plants. As this section will show, Payne's hypothesis of left to right animacy in regards to topic-worthiness is still upheld in Japanese, however in this case it is marked simply by topic and subject particles, *wa* and *ga*, regardless of word order. Japanese

grammar rules are influenced by animacy, specifically with the verbs *iru* and *aru*. Yet, on a scale of linguistic animacy's relatedness to culture, this language would appear below languages with elaborate cultural taxonomies, like Navajo. However, it would appear above languages that do not mark for animacy at all, on the posited scale of how animacy exists in language.

2.1 Particles

In order to discuss animacy in Japanese, there must first be an understanding of how the postpositional particles *wa* and *ga* are used to determine topicality and nominality. These particles typically appear after the topic or subject of the sentence, respectively, and are thus used to discern the two (Koma 1996). These particles are the grammatical manifestations that help to support the one aspect of Payne's definition of animacy that describes it as an order of left to right 'topic-worthiness.' This paper will show that only certain cases can utilize the topic marker. First, the following examples will help show the function of *ga*:

(15a) Mary-ga John-ni hon-o ageta.
 Mary+NOM(SUBJ) John+DAT book+ACC gave
 'Mary gave John a book.'

(15b) John-ni Mary-ga hon-o ageta.
 John+DAT Mary+NOM(SUBJ) book+ACC gave
 'Mary gave John a book.' (Koma 1996)

In these instances, it is clear that word order is irrelevant with the presence of these critical postpositional articles, such as *ga*, to mark the entity that is grammatically the subject. However, more applicable to this paper's argument of context is the topicalizing function of *wa*, as in :

(16a) Kare-wa Yamada-san desu.
 he-TOP. Yamada-Mr. be

‘He is Mr. Yamada.’

(16b) Kare-ga Yamada-san desu.
 He-NOM(SUBJ) Yamada-Mr. be
 ‘Mr. Yamada is he.’ (Malchukov 2009)

In example (16a), the nominal that is marked with *wa* is the topic while the predicate nominal is the comment, and in (16b), the predicate nominal is the topic which makes the nominal+*ga* the comment. *Wa* is also unique in that it is used to denote something that has already been introduced by the speaker, and to separate the topic from the rest of the sentence, typically having the effect of emphasis (Lloyd 2010). For instance, (15a) can be more thoroughly translated as, “As for him, he is Mr. Yamada.” The manifestation of *wa* has also been described as a pragmatic case marker, marking “those participants which show the highest degree of inherent topicality” (Kittila 2011). This observation directly parallels Payne’s definition of animacy relating to topic-worthiness. The implications of *wa* are reminiscent of Navajo’s topicalizing device, the *bi*-prefix, therefore, it is clear that in Japanese, there is also a structure and hierarchy of topicalization from left to right as Payne suggests. This understanding of topicalization is crucial to the discussion in the next section involving the verbs that directly respond to animacy rules.

2.2 *Iru* and *aru* Verbs

The verbs *iru* and *aru* indicate animacy and inanimacy, respectively, of the nominative phrases in sentences. These verbs have both locative and existential meanings when they are intransitive, therefore roughly translated into the English verb ‘be’ in, as well as possessive meanings when they are transitive, or the English equivalent, ‘have’ (Yamamoto 1999). When the verb is intransitive, and thus locative/existential, animacy

agreement corresponds with the topic noun phrase of the sentence; while the verb is transitive, or possessive, it corresponds to the object of the sentence (Sugisaki 2007). For example:

(17) Kooen-ni kodomo-ga iru.
 Park child+NOM be (animate)
 'The child is in the park.'

(18) Kooen-ni neko-ga iru.
 Park cat+NOM be (animate)
 'The cat is in the park.'

(19)*Kooen-ni kodomo-ga aru.
 Park child+NOM be (inanimate)

(20) Kooen-ni isi-ga aru.
 Park stone+NOM be (inanimate)
 'The stone is in the park.'

(21) *Kooen-ni isi-ga iru.
 Park stone+NOM be (animate) (Sugisaki 2007).

The examples above show the locative/existential forms of *iru* and *aru*. Sentences (17) and (18) are grammatically correct because the verb marked for animacy, *iru*, agrees with the inherent animacy of 'child' and 'cat' the sentences' subject noun phrases. Thus, the taxonomy for animates in Japanese is clearly different than that of Navajo, and presumably other language systems, as Japanese allows animates to be classified as any human and animal/living creature, and therefore this level of animacy will illicit the same grammatical manifestations throughout the category. Examples (19) and (21) are ungrammatical because the animacy or inanimacy of their subjects disagrees with their respective verbs.

As mentioned previously, when the verbs *iru* and *aru* are used to indicate possession, the animacy agreement is then derived from the object of the sentence.

(22) Taroo-ni okane-ga aru.
 Taroo money+NOM has (inanimate)
 'Taroo has money.'

(23) Taroo-ni kodomo-ga iru.
 Taroo child+NOM has (animate)
 'Taroo has a child.'

(Sugisaki 2007)

Each of these examples shows the correct alternation of the verb in corresponding with the animacy or inanimacy of the object.

Japanese, is a topic-prominent language, meaning it “organizes its syntax to emphasize the topic-comment structure of the sentence” (Li 1976). In this way, it much more closely fits into Payne’s notion of animacy being driven by topic-worthiness, than a language that is subject-prominent, such as English. Animacy, as manifested in grammar, is more prevalent in Japanese than it is in English, perhaps because of the emphasis on the pragmatic and semantic nature of topicality, versus the purely grammatical concept of subjects. Thus, Japanese falls towards an intermediate position on the cline posited in this paper, which describes the extent that animacy pervades language and culture; on one end a language such as Navajo that has a deeply imbedded cultural taxonomy which is manifested grammatically, and on the other a language such as Japanese, where animacy appears as mostly grammaticalized apart from culture, however still deals with the importance of topicalization.

3. Hindi

This section will briefly outline how animacy is grammaticalized in Hindi. In this case, different from our other two studies of Navajo and Japanese, animacy seems to be

purely grammatical and based on a system of case marking. Animacy is necessarily marked by the suffix *-ko* for accusative and dative objects, and only animates are obligatorily marked (Malchukov 2005).

(24a) Ilaa-ne bacce-ko utaayaa
 Ila-ERG child+ACC lift
 ‘Ila lifted the child.’

(24b) *Ilaa-ne baccaa utaayaa
 Ila+ERG child+ø(NOM) lift (Malchukov 2005)

Example (24a) is grammatical with the *-ko* suffix on the direct object, not only marking the object’s animacy but the accusative case as well. Sentence (24b) shows ‘child’ unmarked, which is inherently the nominative case (Monahan 1995). Therefore, case and grammatical marking for animacy are inextricable from each other. More specifically, if objects are inanimate, they are only marked for animacy (and the accusative case) if they are definite.

(25a) Ilaa-ne haar utaayaa
 Ila+ERG necklace lift
 ‘Ila lifted a necklace.’

(25b) Ilaa-ne haar-ko utaayaa
 Ila+ERG necklace+ACC lift
 ‘Ila lifted the necklace.’

(25a) presents a grammatical sentence, however with an unmarked object because the object is indefinite. Example (25b) requires the *-ko* markedness on the object because it is definite and inanimate. Because the marker is able to occur on both animate and inanimate arguments, it is clear that animacy itself is not the determining factor of when the marking takes place. Kittila et al. claims that the ergative and accusative cases seen in the examples above are “grammatical cases” that are formally determined, while

accusative codes object and ergative codes subject. Therefore, “formal requirements override possible semantic restrictions,” allowing the two cases to appear with both inanimate and animate arguments. In this way, Hindi seems to treat animacy arbitrarily, like case, and therefore presents another extreme on the cline of how animacy is used in language; that is purely for formal and grammatical purposes, regardless of semantics and context.

Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to analyze the many manifestations of animacy in language. The underlying template for defining linguistic animacy that was used was a definition by Thomas Payne, which emphasized the role of pragmatics and “topic-worthiness” in determining what entities could be considered of higher animacy than others. Navajo, being the primary focus, was a study in how elaborately and complicatedly worldview, culture, and taxonomies that arise from belief systems can impact grammatical formalizations. In Navajo, this was apparent to such an extent that not only would not adhering to the animacy hierarchy be ungrammatical, the meaning of a given sentence would also be absurd and illogical. Japanese was discussed as a language that utilized animacy to a lesser extent, however maintained the critical element of topicalization in how animacy was grammatically expressed. Finally, Hindi was meant to represent languages on the opposite end of the cline from Navajo, in that its manifestations of animacy were purely grammatical and governed by other formal elements of grammar, unrelated to pragmatics and cultural context.

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