Chapter 3  Basic Clause Structure

1 Overview

This chapter explains the basic structure of simple clauses. All the points made in this overview are explained in detail in later sections of this chapter.

Clauses consist of a subject followed by a predicate. Structurally, the subject is usually a noun phrase and the predicate is usually a verb phrase. Verb phrases consist of the verb’s complements followed by the verb. The complements can be noun phrases, postpositional phrases, or clauses themselves, and it is the verb that determines the quantity and category of complements. Thus, simple clauses containing transitive verbs will normally have the order of subject-object-verb (see section 2.1). This follows from two features of the grammar: (1) the subject phrase precedes the predicate phrase; (2) the object precedes the verb inside the verb phrase.

Navajo grammar has several other properties that interact with the basic constituent order. First, transitive verbs can have a special prefix that indicates a change in this basic order (see section 2.2) Second, the subject and the complements of the verb can normally be omitted; the verb is the only word that must appear in a clause (see section 2.3). Because noun phrases can be null, there exist sentences consisting of a single noun phrase followed by a transitive verb. Section 4 explains how to tell whether this noun phrase is the subject or the object.

Beyond these considerations, the internal structure of the verb phrase is covered in chapter 4, but section 3 of this chapter gives an introduction to the fact that the verb mostly determines what kinds of constituents that are permitted inside the verb phrase. Section 5 presents other constituents that can appear inside clauses; although the verb is normally the last word in the clause, certain particles can appear after the verb, and these are introduced in section 5.1. Modifiers are normally optional in clauses, and so, in order to keep things simple, they are mentioned only briefly in the present chapter, section 5.2. Finally, Navajo has sentences that lack verbs entirely, and these are introduced in section 6.

This chapter demonstrates the generalizations stated above, and thus explains how to build clauses once you know how to build noun phrases, verb phrases, and postpositional phrases.
2 Basic Constituent Order

2.1 Simple clauses

Navajo is normally described as having subject - object - verb word order. Examples (1) and (2) differ only with respect to the order of the subject and object noun phrases, ’ashkii and ’at’ééd. In such sentences with all third person arguments, the first noun phrase is interpreted as the subject:

(1) ’Ashkii ’at’ééd yizts’qs.
    boy   girl 3-3-kiss.P
    The boy kissed the girl.

(2) ’At’ééd ’ashkii yizts’qs.
    girl  boy 3-3-kiss.P
    The girl kissed the boy.

The verb in the examples above is transitive. The verb in the example below is intransitive, and the subject appears before it:

(3) ’Ashkii yicha.
    boy 3-cry.I
    The boy is crying.

The generalization about basic constituent order is valid for declarative sentences (statements) and for other clauses (complement clauses, modifying clauses, conjoined clauses, etc.) that are in what we call the direct voice. Two caveats must be issued at this point: first, Navajo has an inverse voice that affects the role that noun phrases play; second, noun phrases, in principle, are optional, and so there are many Navajo clauses that contain only a verb.

2.2 Direct vs. Inverse Voice

When a transitive verb has two third person arguments, the object prefix can appear as y-, as in (1) and (2), or as b- as shown below:

(4) ’Ashkii ’at’ééd bizts’qs.
    boy   girl 3b-3-kiss.P
    The girl kissed the boy.

(5) ’At’ééd ’ashkii bizts’qs.
    girl  boy 3b-3-kiss.P
    The boy kissed the girl.
Comparing (1) to (4) and (2) to (5), note that the roles played by the noun phrases has switched. Examples (4) and (5) illustrate the inverse voice and are a specially marked deviation from the subject - object - verb constituent order. The pairs (1) and (5) have the same meaning but have different uses in discourse; the same is the case with examples (2) and (4).

The inverse voice exists only for verbs that have two third person arguments; when a first, second, or fourth person argument is present, the verb occurs only in the direct voice.

2.3 Null Arguments

Many Navajo clauses consist only of a verb. Navajo noun phrases are nearly always optional. Thus, there are sentences that exist that consist only of a verb, or a verb with additional modifiers, but no noun phrases. Here are some examples:

(6) Yizts'qs.
3-3-kiss.P
S/he kissed him/her/it.

(7) Yiniltsá.
3-2-see.P
You saw him/her/it.

Fully-formed verbs always include information about the person and number of the argument(s). Uttering (6) or (7) out of context would be as strange as uttering the English glosses out of context: if it is unclear to whom the pronouns refer, then information necessary for full understanding of the speaker would be missing. But, in a conversation in which it is clear who is being discussed, sentences (6) and (7) would be perfectly understandable. They are exactly like English sentences that contain only pronouns.

The normal way to say a sentence that has only first or second or fourth person arguments is with no noun phrases:

(8) Naashnish.
1-work.CI
I am working.

(9) Shiiniltsá.
1-2-see.P
You saw me.

(10) ’Ajíhosh
4-sleep.I
That one is sleeping.
Example (8) is an intransitive verb with a first person argument; (9) is transitive, with a second person subject and first person object. (10) is intransitive and has a fourth person argument. One of the uses of fourth person is to make polite reference to a particular individual; this meaning is difficult to capture in a simple English gloss. Transitive verbs with third person arguments can appear with zero noun phrases, as in example (6) above, one noun phrase as in (11), or two noun phrases as in (12) below.

(11) Bijh neinitchê.
    deer 3-3-chase.CI
    It is chasing the deer.

(12) Nashdôi bijh neinitchê.
    wildcat deer 3-3-chase.CI
    The wildcat is chasing the deer.

Example (11) can only mean that the deer is being chased by something; it cannot mean that the deer is chasing something. We return to the question of how to determine the roles played by noun phrases in section 4 of this chapter.

3 The Verb and the Clause

The prefixes that appear on the verb determine the other constituents that can or must appear within the clause. Not only can verbs be sentences by themselves, their internal components are an important key to understanding the structure of basic sentences. It will not determine what kinds of modifiers can appear, although its interpretation will affect this as well, but it will determine the categories of the arguments that can appear. We have seen earlier in this chapter that, while noun phrases generally are not required to appear in a clause, the transitivity of the verb determines whether one or two noun phrases can potentially appear in the clause.

3.1 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

In section 2.1 we showed examples of clauses containing transitive and intransitive verbs. The verb determines the kinds of arguments that can appear in the clause. Transitive verbs allow two arguments, a subject and an object; intransitive verbs have one argument, which is the subject. As we pointed out in sections 2.2 and 2.3, the arguments are indicated by prefixes on the verb and may or may not appear in the clause as noun phrases. Examples (13) and (14) contain the intransitive verb da’althosh.

(13) Sàanii da’althosh.
    women pl-3-sleep.I
    The women are sleeping.
The examples below contain the transitive verb *k’íníti’*.

15. Hastiin tsin k’íníti’.
   man wood sever-3-3-break.P
   The man broke the stick.

16. Tsin k’íníti’.
   wood sever-3-3-break.P
   He/she broke the stick.

17. K’íníti’.
   sever-3-3-break.P
   He/she broke it.

The terms *transitive* and *intransitive* are commonly used in the study of grammar, but there are more than two kinds of verbs.

### 3.2 Verbs with Three Arguments

Intransitive verbs have one argument; transitive verbs have two. The verb in the example below has three arguments:

   man INDEF gun 1-3-3-point.P
   Some man pointed a gun at me. (YM 1987:184)

The gloss indicates that the subject is third person, the direct object is third person, and a third argument is first person. The subject of the verb is *hastiin léi’* ‘some man’, who is doing the pointing. The direct object is *bee’eldqqí* ‘a gun’, the instrument that the man is pointing with. The *sh* prefix on the verb designates the speaker, and is the target of the pointing action.

Many Navajo verbs have three arguments, but for most of them, the third argument is the object of a postpositional stem that has been incorporated into the verb. When this happens, a pronominal/agreement prefix appears before the postpositional stem at the beginning of the verb:

   coffee stove 3-from-3-2-take.SRO.I
   Take the coffee from the stove.
The verb in example (19) has the postpositional stem -ts’á-, and bi- indicates that the object of this postposition is third person. The subject is second person; the direct object is gowhééh ‘coffee’, and the object of the postposition is béésh bii’kǫ’í, ‘stove’. Including the object of the incorporated postposition, (19) has three arguments, like (18), although (18) has this characteristic without a postposition. [Note: YM (1987:42) consider the possibility that (18) has a null postposition, but they don’t give any reasons to think it is one thing or the other.]

Incorporated postpositions can also appear in verbs with no direct object:

(20) ’Ólta’ bits’áníyá.
school 3-from-1-go.P
I left school.

This verb has the same incorporated postposition that (19) has. ’Ólta’ ‘school’ expresses the object of the postposition. The verb has a first person subject, but no direct object. The conclusion is that, while nearly all Navajo verbs have subject pronominal/agreement prefixes, some verbs have direct object pronominal/agreement prefixes and others don’t, and some have an indirect object or postpositional object pronominal/agreement prefix and others don’t. The pronominal/agreement prefixes are the key to understanding who is doing what to whom in a Navajo sentence. The verb, then, determines what arguments are possible in a sentence, and so the verb tells you what to look for in understanding a sentence. (What is left over after the arguments have been identified are modifiers and particles. These get interpreted based on their meanings and by figuring out what they modify or operate on.)

3.3 Verbs with no subject

Verbs describing weather conditions have no subject pronominal/agreement prefixes at all:

(21) Nahaltin.
rain.CI
It’s raining.

(22) Deesdoi.
hot.N
It’s hot.

(23) Deesk’aaz.
cold.N
It’s cold.
These verbs cannot appear with a noun phrase that is interpreted as the subject:

(25) (*K’os nahaltin.
cloud rain.CI
It’s raining clouds (This cannot mean that rain is coming from a cloud)

These verbs do not contain subject markers—they do not have first or second person or plural forms.

English, and many other languages, have a requirement that all sentences must have a subject. What happens in the English counterparts of the examples in (21-24) is that a kind of “dummy pronoun” is used to fill the subject position. What we mean by *dummy pronoun* is that the only noun phrase that can appear as subject with these verbs is the pronoun *it*, and this *it* is different from other uses of *it*, in not really mean anything. In other uses, *it* can refer to some inanimate entity; the dummy *it* cannot do this. Navajo, on the other hand, does not require all its sentences to have a subject. So, where English uses a subject that doesn’t really mean anything, Navajo does not need a noun phrase at all. Neither Navajo nor English is especially peculiar in this respect; there are many languages of both types.

In Navajo, if you want to express the idea that the weather condition holds of a particular location, a postpositional modifier is used:

(26) Ti’ódi deesdoi.
outside hot.N
It’s hot outside.

(27) Kodi deesk’aaz.
here cold.N
It’s cold here.

(28) Hooghangóne’ deesdoi.
hogan-in hot.N
It’s hot in the hogan.

(29) Dził bąh nichííí.
Mountain 3-on snow
It is snowing on the mountain.

3.4 Verbs with Experiencer Postpositional Arguments

Many Navajo verbs appear with postpositional phrases that have a special semantic relation to the verb. One class of this kind of verb is used to express psychological states.
The postpositional phrases that accompany these verbs express what we might call the “cognitive experiencer,” the individual that is experiencing the psychological state. Below are some examples:

(30) Bilasáana shíl ≈ikan.
apple 1-with 3-sweet.N
I like apples.

(31) Dí’éétsoh shíl nízhóní.
this coat 1-with 3-like.N
I like this coat. (YM 1987:665)

Note that in English, the cognitive experiencer would be the subject of the verb. In Navajo, this role is represented by a postpositional phrase, and the verb does not have a subject argument. The only pronominal/agreement prefixes on these verbs is in the direct object prefix position.

3.5 Verbs with clausal complements

Another class of verb has a clause as a complement. These are verbs meaning things like ‘think’, ‘know’, believe’, among other, meanings:

Mary John 3-sleep.I 3-think
Mary thinks John is asleep.

(33) [Nimasii béťgízhéę] yínáalniíh.
potato 3-1-peel.P-COMP 3-3-remember-Impf
S/he remembers that I peeled the potatoes.

In each example above, the complement clause is bracketed. There are two key differences between these examples. The verb in (32) does not have any object agreement marker, unlike the verb in (33), and the complement clause in (33) has a complementizer -éę on it, while the complement in (32) has no complementizer. These differences are discussed in chapter 5 along with a range of other issues involving complement clauses. One other difference is that (32) indicates who is doing the thinking, while (33) does not. This difference has nothing to do with the verbs, though; it simply follows from the fact that (32) has a noun phrase subject and (33) does not.

What is noteworthy here is that nearly all the rules that apply for building basic sentences can be used for building complement clauses. This will come as no surprise to grammarians, but it is something few other people think about.

Below is one more example that has the characteristics of the verbs discussed in this section and in the previous one. That is, the verb has a complement clause as well as a cognitive experiencer argument that is represented by a postpositional phrase:
(34) [’Adáádáá’ nóló bił naahóóltánígíí] shił bééhózin.
yesterday hail 3-with rain-nom. 1-with 3-know.N
I know that it rained and hailed yesterday.

Complement clauses are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

3.6 Conclusion

There are other kinds of verbs as well. Full details can be found in chapter 8 on the Verb Phrase, except for clausal complements, which are discussed in chapter 9. The key point of this section is that while modifiers can appear freely as long as they make sense, the verb determines what complements may or must appear, and these complements are realized as noun phrases, postpositional phrases, or clauses.

4 Identifying Subjects and Objects in Simple Sentences

Transitive verbs have two arguments, so one must know which one is the subject and which is the object. In section 2 we introduced the fact that Navajo has a direct and inverse voice that is available for transitive verbs that have two third person arguments. In the direct voice, shown in (35), the object argument is marked by yi-; in the indirect voice, exemplified in (36), the object is marked by bi-:

(35) ’Ashkii ’atééd yoo’į.
boy girl 3-3-see.I
The boy sees the girl.

(36) ’Ashkii ’atééd boo’į.
boy girl 3b-3-see.I
The girl sees the boy.

In section 2, we made the point that the subject appears before the object in the direct voice, and after the object in the indirect voice.

Because noun phrases frequently do not appear, one frequently finds sentences that contain a transitive verb but only one noun phrase. This raises the question of whether the noun phrase is the subject or object. The following pair is perfectly acceptable:

(37) ’Atééd yoo’į.
girl 3-3-see.I
S/he sees the girl.
(38)  'At’ééd  boo’į.
girl  3b-3-see.I
The girl sees him/her/it.

As is evident from the glosses, the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb in the
direct voice is the object and the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb in the
indirect voice is the subject. We can see that this statement applies to (35) and (36) as
well; the rule holds regardless of whether there are one or two noun phrases in the clause.

(39)  **Rule of Subject and Object Assignment:**

For verbs in the direct voice, the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb is
the direct object.

For verbs in the indirect voice, the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb is
the subject.

This rule is a reliable generalization. However, there are cases in which a semantic clash
between the interpretation a verb imposes on its object and the interpretation of a noun
phrase leads to a different understanding of the noun phrase’s function in the sentence. To
see this, consider first the following example, which describes an event of giving:

(40)  Ján Mary bilásáana yeinį’ą.
    John Mary apple  3-to-3-3-give.SRO.P
    John gave an apple to Mary.

Giving events involve three arguments: an agent, a patient, and a recipient. The patient
the role of the entity that changes hands, going from the agent to the recipient. Yeinį’ą
(yaa yinį’ą) is a classificatory verb (see chapter 3) for solid round objects (SRO), and so
the interpretation of the patient is restricted by that classification. In (40), the first noun
phrase is the subject and understood as the agent doing the giving; the second noun
phrase is the recipient; the third is in the direct object position right before the verb, and
designates the patient. Because apples are solid round objects, this sentence is well
formed. Removing noun phrases from the outside in yields results that are expected by
the rule:

(41)  Mary bilásáana yeinį’ą.
    Mary apple  3-to-3-3-give.SRO.P
    He/she gave an apple to Mary.

(42)  Bilásáana yeinį’ą.
    apple  3-to-3-3-give.SRO.P
    He/she gave an apple to him/her.

In (41), there are two noun phrases. The first is the recipient and the second is the SRO. While (42) has only one overt noun phrase, bilásáana ‘apple’ designates a solid round
object, and it is understood as the direct object.
Surprisingly, the following sentence is acceptable:

(43) Mary yein’á.
Mary 3-to-3-3-give.SRO.P
He/she gave it to Mary.

*Mary* is not normally interpreted as a solid round object, and so cannot easily be understood as filling the role of the patient; rather, *Mary* is understood as the recipient. This interpretation is not expected given the rule that the noun phrase immediately before a verb in the direct voice be understood as the direct object. On the other hand, if *Mary* is a newborn baby, all bundled up, *Mary* can be understood as the patient. This possibility, however, does not prevent (43) from having the interpretation of *Mary* as a recipient.

The following examples do not involve classificatory verbs, but they do impose special requirements on the interpretation of the subject. The verb *yiyíhnáád* describes licking events, and the special requirement is that the agent must have a tongue:

(44) Léécháá’í ’awéé’ yiyíhnáád.
   dog           baby 3-3-lick.P
   The dog licked the baby.

This sentence is unambiguous: the dog did the licking and the baby was licked. However, babies have tongues also, so if we remove *léécháá’í* from the sentence, the result is ambiguous:

(45) ’Awéé’ yiyíhnáád.
   baby 3-3-lick.P
   The baby licked it. He/She/it licked the baby.

This can be understood as the baby getting licked or as the baby doing the licking. This ambiguity is unexpected given the Rule of Subject and Object Assignment. Nevertheless, the rule is a good starting point for understanding the role of the constituents within Navajo clauses.

5 Other Constituents

5.1 Post-Verbal Particles

Navajo has many particles, words that tend to be small and clearly do not belong to the major word classes of noun, verb, postposition, or adjective; one could call them adverb, but there are no reliable diagnostics for identifying particles beyond their failure to achieve the status of the other categories. The skillful use of particles is essential for fluency in Navajo, and it is a subtle matter. Each particle has its own distribution in terms of which kinds of constituent it appears within and has scope over, and some particles are
more flexible in this respect than others. The particles mentioned in this section are among those that can have scope over the clause.

A number of particles with various functions can appear in a clause after the verb. The first group pertains to time: the particles *dooleet* and *doo* set the reference time of the clause in the future, the particle *ítt’éé’* establishes reference to the past:

(46) Chidí’ ánídígíí ninááhálñí’í go díí ni *dooleet.*
car new-ÍGÍÍ iter-3-1-buy.R-GO this you future
When I buy a new car, this one will be yours.

(47) Hataalí bikék’ehgóó sodélzin *doo.*
medicine.man 3-footsteps-following 2-pray.I future
Pray, repeating after the medicine man. (YM 1987:199)

(48) ’Ashkii nishlínéédá’í ná’ásht’oh *ítt’éé’.*
boy 1-be.N-past 1-smoke.N past
I used to smoke when I was a boy. (YM 1987:678)

The future particles are sometimes redundant to a future mode in the verb, but not when they appear with a stative (“neuter”) verb. The past particle is not redundant to mode information in the verb because there is no past mode.

Two particles pertain to negation. Clauses are negated by placing *doo* early in the clause and *da* immediately after the verb:

(49) K’ad doo ná’ásht’oh *da.*
now neg 1-smoke.N neg
Now I do not smoke. (YM 1987:678)

The particle *lágo* appears following the verb and indicates a negative command:

(50) Łééchä’a’i chidí yich’i’ yaołtaał *lágo!*
dog car 3-after 3-2-start.off.fast.I neg.imper
Don’t let the dog chase the car!

Negation is discussed in detail in chapter 6; for discussion of the negative imperative marker *lágo*, see chapter 6, section 6.

The generic particle *leh* also appears after the verb:

(51) Haigo shichídí shił yídó’ *leh.*
winter-GO 1-car 1-with 3-jerk.along.I usually
My car always jerks along in the wintertime.

Several other particles occur after the verb that Reichard (1951:300) analyzes as evidential particles, indicating the source of the information or degree of certainty that the speaker has with respect to the information in the sentence. One of the words that
Reichard includes in this list is *jiní*, which consists of the verb stem *ní* ‘say’ and the fourth person subject marker *ji*. It is used frequently in old stories and also to indicate that the information in the sentence is hearsay:

(52) ‘Alk’idää’ Diné bikéyah bikáa’gi tįį’ bíchąg búghahgo
    long.ago Navajo 3-country 3-on-at horse 3-belly 3-3-equal.to-GO
    t’oh del’áá nít’éé’* jínf*.  
    grass pl-3-extend.NP past 4-say
    They say that long ago the grass in the Navajo country was as high as a horse’s belly. (YM 1987:6)

(53) Yiskágqo nináhodoollįįl (daats’) *jínf*.
    tomorrow again-area-rain.F perhaps 4-say
    They say it will (perhaps) rain again tomorrow.

The possibility modals *daats’í*, *sha’šhin*, and *shįį*’ can also appear after the verb, and before *jiní* or *ní*, as indicated in (53). The particles *lá* and *ni*, in the examples below, are additional members of the class of particles that Reichard considers evidential:

(54) Chidí bijéí shi’éétsoh yighánígháázh *lá*.
    car 3-organ 1-coat 3-through-3-eat.X discover
    (Acid from) the car battery ate through my coat. (YM 1987:759)

(55) Díí *lá* tsé ‘át’é *ni*.
    this discover rock 3-be emph
    This is a rock! (YM 1987:513)

*Lá* expresses the idea that something unexpected is being reported; *ni* indicates that a statement is emphatically true. Unlike *ni*, *lá* can also appear after other constituents, as example (55) illustrates.

The example below has an embedded clause with *nít’éé’* at the end of it, and a main clause ending with the particle *lá*. The square brackets indicate the boundaries of the two clauses:

(56) [’Abe’ nahálñii’ *nít’éé’*] [t’áadoo choosh’įįhí sits’ąą’ yíchxq’ *lá*].
    milk 3-1-buy.P past  NEG 3-1-use.Í-Í 1-away.from 3-spoil discover
    I bought some milk but it spoiled on me before I could use it. (YM 1987:758)

The post-verbal particles introduced in this section are not a unified class. For example, certain combinations of them are possible and others are not. As the example below shows, the negative particle *da* can appear before *lá*. The opposite order is not acceptable, however:
(57) Đí ’at’ééd bitah doo hats’íid *da lá.
   this girl 3-body neg area-well.N neg discover
   This girl is not well.

(58) *Đí ’at’ééd bitah doo hats’íid lá *da.
   this girl 3-body neg area-well.N discover neg

There is more discussion about the use of clause-final particles in chapter 4. The main point of this section is to show that, while the verb is normally the last major category word to appear in a clause, a variety of particles can appear after it.

5.2 Modifiers

Various kinds of clause-internal modifiers occur. The constituents in bold below are examples of modifiers expressing time and location, but of course there are many other kinds:

(59) T’áá ’e’e’ááh bik’eh tlah shinií’ bínínáshtlo, every evening ointment 1-face 3-3-1-rub.X
   I rub cream on my face every evening. (YM 1987:718)

(60) K’ad doo ná’ásht’oh da. (= (47) above)
   now neg 1-use.tobacco.N neg
   Now I do not smoke. (YM 1987:678)

(61) ’Adéédéé’ chídí ’ániidí léí’ kintahdi tádíílbááz.
   yesterday car new INDEF town-in 3-1-drive.around.P
   Yesterday I tried out a new car in town. (YM 1987:698)

(62) ’Ólta’dí na’ashch’aáh b’hoosh’aah.
   school-in 1-draw.I 3-1-learn.X
   I’m learning to draw at school. (YM 1987:550)

Temporal adverbs tend to appear at the beginning of the clause. Example (61) begins with a temporal adverb and has a locative adverb modifying the verb. The example below has two conjoined clauses with a temporal adverb at the beginning of each:

(63) [’Adéédéé’ shiih yílk’aaz] dóó [t’éeédéé’ yéígo ’ásdzaa].
   yesterday 1-into 3?-cold.move.P and last.night hard 1-make.P
   Yesterday I caught cold and I got worse last night. (YM 1987:130/764)
6 Nonverbal Predicates

All our discussion so far has been about clauses in which the main predicate is a verb. Navajo has sentences that entirely lack verbs:

(64)  Shítáláwosh naaki.
       1-soap  two
       I have two bars of soap.

(65)  Díí hí’ ni.
       this  horse  you
       This horse is yours. (YM 1987: 627)

Just as English has a rule that requires all its sentences to have subjects (discussed in section 3.3), it requires all its sentences to include a verb. Once again we see that Navajo does not have this requirement. The main predicate in (64) is a number, and in (65) it is a pronoun. Pronouns are a kind of noun phrase. Common noun phrases can serve as the main predicate of a sentence as well:

(66)  Lók’aah Nteeldi bighaan.
       Ganado  3-home
       Ganado is his/her home.

(67)  T’áá yá’át’éehgo ’atiin.
       just 3-good.N-GO road
       The road is all right.

(68)  [Ñlíé dzilghá’a di ts’ídá ’agháhóó’áhádi] shikéyah.
       there mountain-top-at truly highest.point-at 1-land
       My land is situated on top of the mountain at the highest point. (YM 1987: 34)

Unlike verbal predicates, noun phrase predicates do not show agreement with their subjects. In the last of these examples, the subject is the bracketed postpositional phrase. Color terms routinely function as the main predicate in a clause, but these are actually neuter verbs:

(69)  Hooghan ligai.
       hogan  3-white.N
       The hogan is white. (Elgin 1973: 53)

It is clear that ligai is a verb because there are other inflected forms for different subjects: finishgai means ‘I’m white’, and tinílgai means ‘you are white’. Navajo does have two copular verbs, but in the cases mentioned above, they do not appear. Below are examples:
(70) Shizhé’é ’azee’ííl’íní nilí.
1-father doctor 3-be.N
My father is a doctor.

(71) Díí tsin gad bits’ąá dóó ’át’é.
this stick juniper 3-separated-from 3-be.N
This stick is from a juniper.

Copular verbs are discussed in more detail in chapter 8. We close this section with a pair of examples from Young & Morgan (1987) that contrast a non-verbal predicate with a similar sentence that uses a copula. The first example is like (65) above and simply indicates possession:

(72) Díí naaltsoos shí.
this book me
This book is mine. (YM 1987:8g)

The second indicates a change of state and uses a copula:

(73) Díí naaltsoos shíí’ silíí’.
this book mine 3-become
This book has come to be mine. (YM 1987:8g)

The pronominal predicate in (71) has no prefix that can indicate the idea of change across time. A verb is needed to convey this meaning.

7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of Navajo clause structure. To really build sentences in Navajo, it is necessary to understand the internal structure of noun phrases, verb phrases, and postpositional phrases. The next few chapters cover these topics.