

## Temporal interpretation and discourse structure in Northern Paiute

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Many languages use adverbial subordinators to mark temporal relations between clauses, e.g. English *before* and *after*. Northern Paiute (Uto-Aztecan, Numic: western United States) lacks such clausal connectors, though it does have a verbal suffix—the so-called sequential morpheme *-si*—which, Thornes (2003:456) says, ‘... marks the verbs of subordinate clauses that code events that temporally precede another event’:

- (1) Su=naatsi’i=bino’o u-ma **si’e-hu-si** yaa **poyoha-ga’a**.  
NOM=boy=PTC 3SG-LOC **scare-PUNC-SEQ** there **run-MOT**  
‘The boy got scared of him and started to run.’ (prompted narrative, EM, BP25-2-t1, 85)

In (1), the sequential clause linearly precedes an unmarked clause, and the event it describes (scaring) temporally precedes the event described by the unmarked clause (running). This description is inadequate, however, since the sequential clause can also follow the unmarked clause in linear order; when it does, the event it describes can either temporally follow or precede that of the unmarked clause. Not all combinations of temporal and linear order are possible, as *-si* never occurs in a clause that temporally follows a clause it precedes in linear order.

Since there is no unique temporal relation conveyed by the sequential morpheme in Northern Paiute, I explore the possibility that that it constrains directly the discourse structures an utterance can appear in. In most prominent theories of discourse structure (Hobbs 1979, Mann and Thompson 1988, Kehler 2002, Asher and Lascarides 2003), utterances are related by hierarchically organized RHETORICAL RELATIONS, which contribute to the utterances’ temporal interpretation, among other things. Assuming Asher and Lascarides’ Segmented Discourse Representation Theory for concreteness, I propose that the sequential morpheme marks that the discourse will be continued with a Narration relation. That is, *-si* signals that the next clause will push the narrative forward. This accounts directly for the temporal interpretations that a sequential clause can and cannot have. Morphemes with similar but not identical functions have been identified in other languages, e.g. sentence-initial *puis* in French (Bras et al. 2001) and the coordinator *and* in English (Gómez Txurruka 2003). But the sequential morpheme in Northern Paiute is unique in being forward oriented. Rather than restricting how an utterance relates to preceding discourse, it dictates how subsequent utterances must relate to the existing discourse.

### References

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