

“What does *nahei*’- ‘then...’ actually mean in Aaniiih/Gros Ventre?”

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This presentation focuses on a recently completed small database of Aaniiih natural discourse (c. 900 sentences). The Aaniiih grammar (Cowell and Brockie 2024: 273, 386-88) provides a brief account of the Aaniiih form *nahei*’- ‘(and) then.PST’ and the equivalent *wookiih* (DUBIT) *nahei*’- used in traditional narratives, indicating that the prefix is used to indicate logically or typically sequential action, as in ‘he saw the bear, and then he got scared.’ The Arapaho grammar (Cowell and Moss 2008) provides roughly the same account for Arapaho *ne*’-, narrative form *he’ne*’-. But no detailed study has been done of what counts or is allowable as “sequential” action in Aaniiih, grammatically or culturally, and one cannot assume that the prefix is simply equivalent to English ‘and then.’ In fact, there is a separate ‘and (then/next)...’ discourse construction in the language, which learners often use; in fact, Aaniiih (and Arapaho) learners have difficulty acquiring the *nahei*’-‘then’ construction, which does not make use of either ‘and’ or overt tense marking.

This presentation examines the roughly 80 examples of the prefix used in the Aaniiih database, along with the verb in the preceding clause. It finds that roughly 57% of the time, the subject of both verbs is the same. Another 7% of the time, the object of both verbs is the same (but not the subject). While this 64% continuity figure initially seems low, another 22% of the time, the object in the first clause is elevated to subject in the second clause, while in 5% of cases the subject in the first clause becomes the object in the second clause. Thus, not unexpectedly, this construction relies heavily on continuity in referents (91% of the time), if not necessarily grammatical roles, though with either subject continuity or elevation from object to subject accounting for 79% of the total occurrences. This still leaves a significant number of cases where the construction does not involve any referent continuity, however, and these will be examined in detail. In particular, I examine the degree to which causal/logical sequentiality is involved in the construction, vs. “typicality” of action in “scenes,” vs. grammatical roles vs. pragmatic activation status and prominence of the referents in the discourse, vs. potential use as a narrative feature indicating unexpected connections. Findings at this point suggest that a combination of pragmatic status and narrative manipulation and highlighting are actually the best ways to understand the prefix. (For example, when there is no referent continuity, there is a strong tendency to express the discontinuous new referent as an overt, preverbal noun, which is the marked position.) Finally, some comparative data is provided from the much larger Arapaho corpus, since the two languages are closely related, and additional consideration is given to the broader literature on conjunctions and on narrative analysis.