



Time for a change? The semantics and pragmatics of marking temporal progression in an Australian language

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Abstract

This paper contributes to a more general understanding of the semantic diversity in temporal connectives cross-linguistically by investigating in some detail a clitic found in the Australian language Jaminjung. This clitic, =*biyang*, variously translates into English as *now* or *then*. *Now* and *then* in English have complex meanings and each can be said to correspond, temporally, to at least two different semantic representations. We propose that the Jaminjung clitic always signals temporal progression, and because of the absence of any deictic component is compatible with all tenses and aspects. Drawing on the analysis of English *then* by Altshuler (2009) and representation of tense and temporal progression in discourse in Discourse Representation Theory (DRT) (Kamp and Reyle, 1993; Kamp et al., 2011), we argue that the clitic expresses a relation between two events, locating the event of its host clause in the consequent state of an antecedent event, and so does not contribute a location time for the eventuality in its clause. Yet, the clitic is also used in stative clauses and can relate two states in a relation of temporal progression. Our analysis proposes that the clitic in such cases relies on a cessation implicature (Altshuler and Schwarzschild, 2012) as well as what we have termed an inception implicature. The end and start of the two states are events that a hearer needs to infer and order via a relation of temporal succession. Temporal inferences are supported by inferences of rhetorical relations (Asher and Lascarides, 2003). We also examine various discourse marking functions of the clitic, arguing that it is used to mark progression in discourse time in a way that parallels its temporal functions. Crown Copyright © 2015 Published by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Semantics; Pragmatics; Discourse temporal connective; Temporal progression; 'Now'; 'Then'

1. Introduction

Detailed research on the formal semantic and discourse pragmatic properties of temporal connectives has recently contributed to new understandings of their meanings. While this research has primarily focused on European languages such as French (e.g. Bras et al., 2003, 2009) and English (e.g. Altshuler, 2009) there have been some exceptions such as the analysis of two temporal markers in Korean (Lee and Choi, 2009). The present paper contributes to cross-linguistic discussion about the semantics and pragmatics of the two temporal adverbs *now* and *then*, which also often function as discourse markers, by examining in some detail a clitic found in the Australian language Jaminjung. The clitic =*biyang* variously corresponds to English *now* or *then* and is translated by speakers into the Kriol word *na*, ultimately originating in English *now*. The use of similar markers in Australian languages is widespread, although there is yet little detailed analysis available (but see Ritz et al., 2012, who examine a similar clitic in Panyjima).

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Now and *then* in English have complex meanings and each can be said to correspond, temporally, to at least two different semantic representations. Other languages vary in the way they lexicalize such temporal information, with some having two words for *now* (e.g. Korean, Lee and Choi, 2009); Korean *icey* is used only when temporal progression also obtains (narrative *now*); otherwise *cikum* is used. Other languages even have three equivalents (e.g. Russian, Gladkova, 2012). The functions of the English adverb *then* are to express temporal progression or update (narrative *then*) and to express coterminality; the latter use can be paraphrased with the expression 'at that time'. Just like *now*, English *then* can be translated by more than one adverb in other languages (e.g. French, Bras et al., 2003, 2009 and Hungarian, Fretheim and Vaskó, 1996). In addition, we find that both *now* and *then* are also used as discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987).

The Jaminjung clitic =*biyang* provides us with an example of a different way in which narrative *now* and *then* can be expressed. We argue that:

- (i) it always signals temporal progression, and depending on the tense of the clause is translatable by *now* or *then*;
- (ii) it expresses a relation between two events, locating the event of its host clause in the consequent state of an antecedent event, and so does not contribute to locating the time for the eventuality in its clause relative to the time of utterance;
- (iii) yet, the clitic is also used in stative clauses and can relate two states in a relation of temporal progression. Our analysis proposes that the clitic in such cases relies on a cessation implicature (Altshuler and Schwarzschild, 2012) as well as what we have termed an inception implicature. The end and start of the two states are events that a hearer needs to infer and order via a relation of temporal succession;
- (iv) the clitic is also used to mark progression in discourse time as well as topic shift, in a way that parallels its temporal functions.

Examples (1) and (2) illustrate some uses of =*biyang*, translated by (*and*) *then* and *now* respectively.² When used in the focal part of a clause, the clitic combines with all tenses without privileging any. Its main meaning in such uses is to express temporal progression.

- (1) *thawaya ga-gba ngantha-ngantha:n,*
eating 3SG-be.PST RDP-what
*n, jalag=biyang gani-yu *
HESIT good=SEQ 3SG>3SG-say/do.PST
'he ate something, uh, and **then** he got better' [DM: ES96_V06_02.135]
- (2) *bib nga-mili-ny ngardurru, janga=biyang nga-yu*
lift.up 1SG>3SG-get/handle-PST heavy sore=SEQ 1SG-be.PRS
'I lifted up something heavy, and **now** I'm sore' [field notes]

As a discourse marker, the clitic has interactional functions. The excerpt in (3) follows the conclusion of a narrative co-constructed by speakers EH and IP which is subsequently commented on by the researcher (ESB) and EH. IP then initiates the telling of a new narrative. Just like English *then* in the translation of the utterance, =*biyang* relates to the interactional progression ('given the interaction so far, what now/then'), not the temporal progression.

- (3) ESB: ah that's a good story, the old people knew all these things
EH: 'yes they knew everything and taught us everything'

² The following conventions and abbreviations are used in transcription and glossing of examples: , (comma) – non-final prosodic boundary; \ – final prosodic boundary (falling contour); ^ – main prosodic prominence in intonation unit ("sentence accent"); 1, 2, 3 – 1st/2nd/3rd person; 12 – inclusive 1st person: 1st and 2nd; 13 – exclusive 1st person: 1st and 3rd; ABL – Ablative; starting point of motion; ALL – Allative; end point of motion; COLL – Collective; CONTR – Contrastive focus; C.TOP – Contrastive topic; DAT – Dative; DEC – Declarative (in Korean); DEM – Demonstrative (general, distance-neutral); DIST – Distal; DS – Different subject clitic; DU – Dual; ERG – Ergative; EVID – Egophoric evidential marker; FS – False start; GIVEN – NP referent 'given'/accessible; IMP – Imperative; INST – Instrumental; IPFV – (Past) Imperfective; IRR – Irrealis; ITER – Iterative; LOC – Locative; LOC.ABL – Ablative (on locational nominals); LOC.ALL – Allative (on locational nominals); NEG – Negation; NM – Clausal nominaliser (Korean); OBL – Oblique pronominal (dative, benefactive, locative functions); ORIG – Origin case, source or cause; PL – Plural; POSS – Possessor/possessive; POT – Potential/Future; PRG – Progressive; PROPR – Proprietary ('with', 'having'); PROX – Proximal; PRS – Present; PST – Past (in Jaminjung: past perfective); QUAL – Quality nominaliser; RDP – Reduplication; REFL – Reflexive/Reciprocal; RESTR – Restrictive ('just X, right at X, still V'); SEQ – Sequential clitic; SG – Singular; SIMIL – Similitative; SUBORD – Subordinator (non-specific); TAG – Tag (glosses various tags on questions or affirmative tags); TOP – Topic marker (in Korean); TR – Transitive marker (in Kriol); > – separates glosses for Actor and Undergoer in inflecting verb pronominal prefixes (e.g. 3PL>2SG 'they (acting) on you'). Underlining of words in examples marks Kriol loans or code switches.

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