Northern Paiute

Ruth Hoodie Lewis
Boise State University

Timothy Thornes
Boise State University
Northern Paiute (ISO 639-3, pao) is a Numic language of the Western branch and represents the northwestern-most extent of the Uto-Aztecan family. The language is described as consisting of two major dialects and numerous subdialects. Nichols (1974) refers to the southern Northern Paiute dialect as Nevada Northern Paiute (NNP, historically also called Paviotsot) and the northern variety represented here as Oregon Northern Paiute (ONP, which includes Bannock). Speaker estimates are somewhat anecdotal but generally fall within the 400–700 range. Speakers are unevenly distributed across various reservation communities of the northern Great Basin region of the western United States. Speakers of ONP outnumber speakers of NNP groups, and the majority of all fluent first-language speakers live on the Fort McDermitt reservation on the Oregon-Nevada border.

The texts included here come from two very distinct speech genres (a legend and a voicemail phone message) and two distinct generations of speakers hailing from different reservation communities (Burns, in southeastern Oregon, and Owyhee [Duck Valley], on the Idaho-Nevada border). Both speak varieties of ONP.

FIRST WHITES IN OUR TERRITORY (HARNEY VALLEY)¹

†Marian (Jim) Louie, narrator
collapsed
recorded by
†Justine (Louie) Brown
March 7, 1979, Burns Paiute Reservation

The Burns Paiute, referred to as the Wadateka’ta [wa’datikaʔa] (seepweed seed eater) Band,² consider the vast expanse of territory that includes Harney Valley and what is now the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge their tibiwa, or home territory. The refuge contains a remnant of what was once a vast wetland rich in fish, game, bird, and plant life, resources that the nimi ‘people’ of the region have subsisted on for millennia.

¹ We would like to recognize the skilled assistance of †Myrtle (Louie) Peck and †Rena (Adams) Beers in the production of this important and challenging narrative.
² Band names are typically derived from a characteristic local food source, in this case, the common seepweed (var. Suaeda intermedia).
The first major cattle operations in the area of Harney Valley appeared sometime in the 1860s, although the impact of cattle on life in the northern Great Basin may have been felt well before that time. Tensions in the area gave rise to the Bannock War of 1878 and resulted in the forced exodus from the region and the total loss of territory. The impact of large cattle herds upon scant supplies of fresh water is well documented, and water remains a source of tension in the region, as does the management of federal land generally—including the allocation of grazing rights. The occupation of the headquarters of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by an armed militia in January 2016 drew both national media attention and swift condemnation by the region’s original occupants, whose cultural sites had been violated by the takeover.

This recording was made at the home of the narrator, Marian (Jim) Louie, by the eldest of her ten children, Justine (Louie) Brown, herself a fluent speaker of the language. She shared the recording with us so that it could be digitized and made easily available for others to enjoy. The narrative is unique in several ways. Louie begins her narration with a vocal quality that suggests actual performance—lengthy, drawn-out vowels delivered at a higher pitch through the first few utterances. The narrative also includes a performance of a song. Since the narrative is not “mythical” in the typical sense but rather ethno-historical in nature, the character and context of the song does not fit into either myth-song category described in Sapir (1910). The song recorded here, according to the narrator, was created by young women of the Wadateka’a as a means of recounting this unusual circumstance—the arrival of settlers passing into and through Harney Valley.

The text carries numerous additional features of linguistic interest, including a rich vocabulary of geospatial reference and remarkable visual detail. The narrator describes the path taken by the ox team and the dust raised by them as they passed along the edge of the valley. The speaker makes ample use of prosodic vowel devoicing and complex predicate structures, as well as nominalized clauses and other derivational processes to describe nonnative items exchanged with the new arrivals to their territory.

In the first tier of each line of text below, orthographic {e} represents the high central vowel /ɨ/, and the glottal stop /ʔ/ is represented with an apostrophe {‘}. The second, morphological breakdown, tier employs a phonemicized Americanist transcription system. Primary stress is highly regular, with very few marked exceptions (cf. mú’asu ‘already’ in line 1), and appears on the second mora of the phonological word (not including proclitics). Prefixes trigger a leftward shift in primary stress, while proclitics do not.

(1) ka mú’asu su taibo kadu’uku.
   ka=mú’asu su=taibo kaduʔu–ku
   ACC=already NOM=white.person gone–PROSP

   ‘Long ago, the white people didn’t exist (around here).’
There were only Indians here (living) in Harney Valley.

Those (coming) this direction,

from the East who came driving cattle as they came along;

this way, by this—along beside Castle Rock (they) kept coming this way,

kept coming and

to here having appeared (into the open) then,3

the Indians didn’t expect such things to be coming here.

3 The meaning of the form is not entirely clear but has to do with becoming visible from across the valley, having turned out into it from among the hills.
Later on then they came out from (a draw) this way across from those that were there.’

‘Those that were across there, the Indians, saw them.’

‘That kind of thing (wagon train) just kept a-coming, (they) say.’

‘(They were) driving cattle of that sort (oxen) this way, then,’

‘while coming along this way,’

‘beside that lake—hot springs (near) the hills,’

‘on this side (they) kept going.’

‘There going along on this side of Harney Lake.’

‘(They) kept heading west then,’

‘That kind of thing (wagon train) just kept a-coming, (they) say.’

‘while coming along this way,’

‘beside that lake—hot springs (near) the hills,’

‘on this side (they) kept going.’

‘There going along on this side of Harney Lake.’

‘(They) kept heading west then,’
(18) ibi: yuutu a natsakwakapenitu miadabina,
   ibi yuu–tu a=natsakwaka–pini–tu mia–dabi–na
DEM this.way–to INDF=turn.out.under–CONT–to go–CONT–PTCP
‘this way (they) turned out into the open (upon a flat) and went on,’

(19) me neme yaisi ka:: me ibi: yuu manipenide, yuutu.
   mi=nimi yaisi ka mi=ibi yuu mani–pini–di
PL=person then PTC PL=DEM this.way do–CONT–NMLZ
   yuu–tu
   hither–to
‘while the Indians remained over here.’

(20) manipenide yaisi ka me bunina,
   mani–pini–di yaisi ka=mi=buni–na
do–CONT–NMLZ then ACC=PL=see–PTCP
‘Those (that remained) from here saw them’

(21) yu’u me takwaina yaisi emeba semenna.
   yuʔu mi=ta–kwai–na yaisi imi–ba siminna
like.this PL=IP/FOOT–follow–PTCP then they–by together
   ‘and followed along beside them (on either side) together.’

(22) emeba semenna yaisi kai tia’a me kesichapaana emeba semenna.
   imi–ba siminna yaisi kai=tiaʔa mi=kisič=paana
they–by together then NEG=thusly PL=angry.at=DISJUNCT
   imi–ba siminna
   they–by together
   ‘(They) were together with them, not angry toward them, but together
   by them.’

(23) yu’u me te maima me matsakwa’ya.
   yuʔu mi=ti=mai–ma mi=matsakwaʔya
like.this PL=LOGO=hand–INSTR PL=wave
   ‘And they waved to them.’

(24) ume yaisi, taibo tia’a obida umeba manisi,
   umi yaisi taibo=tiaʔa obida umi–ba mani–si
they then white.person=thusly slowly they–by do–SEQ
   ‘And those white folks were passing by them slowly,’

(25) me neme yaisi miu me natebangana, “Hadipo waihate!”
   mi=nimi yaisi mi–u mi=natibaŋa–na
PL=person then QUOT–FOC PL=fam.greet–PTCP
Hadipo_waihati!
[greeting]
‘and then the Indians called out to them (as relatives), “Greetings!”’

(26) mii me nattebangana yaisi,
   mii mi=nattibanja-na yaisi
   quot PL=familiar.greet–PTCP then
‘So (they) called to them (in friendship).’

(27) me taibo yaisi ka nattakwatina
   mi=taibo yaisi ka=nattakwati-na
   PL=white.person then ACC=get.down–PTCP
‘Then the whites got down’

(28) icha te kwenenawaitu.
   i–ča ti=kwıgina–wai–tu
   PROX–ACC LOGO=wagon–LOC–to
‘from their wagons.’

(29) węgenawaitu yaatu tsasawikena ka ezekwi,
   wıgina–wai–tu yaa–tu tsasawi–ki–na ka=izikwi
   wagon–LOC–to here–to unload–APPL–PTCP ACC=blanket
‘(They) unloaded from their wagons a blanket,’

(30) tiipema wepadana owitu (i)cha,
   tiip–ma wi=pada–na owi–tu i–ča
   earth–upon IP/LONG–spread–PTCP DEM–to PROX–ACC
‘which (they) spread out upon the ground,’

(31) poksawaitu totsakwatina,
   poksa–wai–tu totsakwati–na
   box–LOC–to bring.down–PTCP
‘taking it down from a box,’

(32) oo ka icha nageewa’yade pahmu
   oo ka=i–ča na–ki–waʔya–di pahmu
   DEM ACC=PROX–ACC MID–IP/BITE–chew–NMLZ tobacco
‘like so, this chewing tobacco,’

(33) tuupahmu mii me neme ni’a ka oo?nosu
   tuu–pahmu mii mi=nimi niʔa ka=ooʔnosu
   black–tobacco QUOT PL=person call ACC=long.ago
‘“black tobacco,” the Indians called it back then.’

---

4 The source and literal meaning of this greeting is currently unknown.
(34) ukau yaisi ka me naana nanaamo’akena,
\[ u\-\text{ka}\-\text{u} \quad \text{yaisi ka}\=\text{mi}\=\text{naana} \quad \text{na}\=\text{naamo}\?\text{a}\=\text{ki}\=\text{na} \]
\[ 3\text{SG}\=\text{ACC}\=\text{FOC} \quad \text{then} \quad \text{ACC}\=\text{PL}\=\text{men} \quad \text{MID}\=\text{divide}\=\text{APPL}\=\text{PTCP} \]
‘And so it was divided among the men,’

(35) me pahmu’imanagakena me nama tia’.
\[ \text{mi}\=\text{pahmu}\?=\text{i}\=\text{managa}\=\text{ki}\=\text{na} \quad \text{mi}\=\text{nama}\=\text{tia}? \]
\[ \text{PL}\=\text{smoke}\=\text{demonstrate}\=\text{APPL}\=\text{PTCP} \quad \text{PL}\=\text{distribute}\=\text{thusly} \]
‘who they showed how to smoke, distributing it among them thusly.’

(36) yaisi ka icha mommoko’ichaku, ichau yaisi tsi
\[ \text{yaisi ka} \quad i\=\text{ča} \quad \text{m}\\text{mo}\=\text{mmoko}?=\text{ni}\=\text{ča}\=\text{ku} \quad i\=\text{ča}\=\text{u} \]
\[ \text{then} \quad \text{ACC}\=\text{PROX}\=\text{ACC} \quad \text{DISTR}~\text{woman}\=\text{have}\=\text{PROSP} \quad \text{PROX}\=\text{ACC} \quad \text{FOC} \]
‘And then to their womenfolk they gave dishes,’

(37) nanatsachakwide kamme pekwaiku me saakwa—(te)kwa’ni
\[ \text{na}\=\text{na}\=\text{tsa}\=\text{čakwi}\=\text{di} \quad \text{kammi} \quad \text{pi}\=\text{kwai}\=\text{ku} \]
\[ \text{DISTR}\=\text{MID}\=\text{IP/GRASP}\=\text{carry}\=\text{NMLZ} \quad \text{jackrabbit} \quad \text{FOC.PRO}\=\text{LOC}\=\text{LOC} \]
\[ \text{mi}\=\text{saa}\=\text{kwa}\=\text{kwa}\=\text{ni} \quad \text{mani}\=\text{pinin}\=\text{di} \quad \text{uuni}\=\text{ku} \]
\[ \text{PL}\=\text{boil}\=\text{LOC}\=\text{SIMIL} \quad \text{do}\=\text{CONT}\=\text{NMLZ} \quad \text{that.kind}\=\text{ACC} \]
\[ \text{saa}\=\text{nu} \quad \text{mi}\=\text{himmi}\=\text{nn} \quad \text{boil}\=\text{INST} \quad \text{PL}\=\text{give}\=\text{PTCP} \]
‘(and) buckets (pots) like they use for boiling jackrabbits in to those that did that kind of cooking (they) gave those.’

(38) yaisi ka namamakwesi tewau miadapikusi,
\[ \text{yaisi ka}\=\text{nama}\=\text{makwi}\=\text{si} \quad \text{tiwa}\=\text{u} \quad \text{mia}\=\text{dapi}\=\text{ku}\=\text{si} \]
\[ \text{then} \quad \text{ACC}\=\text{distribute}\=\text{finish}\=\text{SEQ} \quad \text{also}\=\text{FOC} \quad \text{go}\=\text{CONT}\=\text{PROSP}\=\text{SEQ} \]
‘Then when they were done, they went on again,’

(39) ibii yuutute me tsitewau.
\[ \text{ibi} \quad \text{yuu}\=\text{tu}\=\text{ti} \quad \text{mi}\=\text{tsi}\=\text{tiikwi} \]
\[ \text{DEM} \quad \text{this.way}\=\text{to}\=\text{LOC} \quad \text{PL}\=\text{IP/SHARP}\=\text{tell} \]
‘and this way, (they) pointed them the way’

(40) yuutu me miimanakakaketi
\[ \text{yuu}\=\text{tu} \quad \text{mi}\=\text{mania}\=\text{manaka}\=\text{ki}\=\text{ti} \]
\[ \text{this.way}\=\text{to} \quad \text{PL}\=\text{go}\=\text{demonstrate}\=\text{APPL}\=\text{TNS} \]
‘(and) showed them which way to go.’
me neme yaisi yuu me matsakwai’ya ka me mi’a.
mi=nimi yaisi yuu mi=matsakwai?ya ka=mi=mi?a
PL=person then this.way PL=wave ACC=PL=go.DUR
‘And the Indians waved to them as they left.’

Ibii chaisi yuutu kussito’no’ipeni, isu
ibi čaisi yuu–tu kussi–to?vno?i–pin i–su
DEM then this.way–to dust–raising–CONT PROX–NOM
‘And along the way, raising dust,’

wegena’a ka me gutsu, miadabina,
wigina?a ka=mi=kutsu mia–dabi–na
wagon ACC=PL=cattle go–CONT–PTCP
‘the wagon, the cattle, (they) kept going,’

tedakussijatu mi’a.
ANTIP–IP/FOOT–dust–hence–to go.DUR
‘going through the dust (they) stirred up.’

Ibi tia’ yaisi, me’che’ka.
ibi=tia? yaisi mi?či?ka
DEM=thusly then go.out.of.sight
‘So that way then (they) went out of sight.’

Oonosu ya’aa me muhipunide.
oono–su ya?aa mi=muhi–puni–di
at.the.time–ADV Here 3PL=first–see–NMLZ
‘At that time, those that first saw them,’

Yau su manipenisi me punni.
yaa u–su mani–pini–si mi=punni
here 3SG=NOM do–CONT–SEQ 3PL=see
‘the one(s) that belong here saw them.’

Me punnipenina yaisi,
mi=punni–pini–na yaisi
PL=see–CONT–PTCP then
‘Seeing them then,’

oo chaisi ka saa’a yaisi (i)su yuuni’yuu hii yaa’no,
oo=čaisi ka=saa?a yaisi i–su yuuni–?yu hii
DEM=then ACC=later then PROX–NOM this.kind–NOM thing
yaa?no
??
‘so it was later on these ones,’
(50) pede mommoko‘ni kaa ka me punina yaisi ka pemisu nikiwehenna;
 pidi mo~mmoko?ni ka ka=mi=puni-na yaisi
 recent DISTR~woman MOD ACC=PL=see–PTCP then
 kaa=pimi–su nikwihi–nna
 ACC=they–EMPH IP/SPEECH.sing–PTCP
 ‘the young women that saw them made their own song;’

(51) emema nikweheklesi yaisi,
 imi–ma nikwihi–kwi–si yaisi
 they–on IP/SPEECH.sing–FUT–SEQ then
 ‘having made a song about them then,’

(52) me, oo tia’, (me—) umema tenikwehe,
 mi=oo=tia? umi–ma tinikwihi
 PL=DEM=thusly they–on sing
 ‘so it was, they sang about them’

(53) ka me miadapi yuutu
 ka=mi=mia–dapi yuu–tu
 ACC=PL=go–CONT this.way–to
 ‘as they went along the way.’

(54) ibii me miatapi.
 ibi mi=mia–tapi
 DEM PL=go–CONT
 ‘This way they continued.’

(55) Ka saa’a yaisi ka peesu oitu,
 kaa=saa?a yaisi ka=pii–su oii–tu
 ACC=later then ACC=FOC.PRO–EMPH DEM=to
 ‘Later, on their own over there,’

(56) oitu yuu tenikwehena (i)su yu—yuuni’yu mommoko‘ni tenikwehe
 umau tenikwehe ka okka te punnina.
 oii–tu yuu tinikwihi–na i–su yuuni–?yu
 DEM–to this.way sing–PTCP PROX–NOM this–NOM
 mo~mmoko?ni tinikwihi u–ma–u tinikwihi
 DISTR~woman sing 3SG–on–FOC sing
 kaa=u–ka ti=puni–na.
 ACC=3SG–ACC LOGO=see–PTCP
 ‘there singing, these women sang, sang about what it was they had seen.’

(57) Tenikwehena yaisi ka, ka miu ka e’na’wi,
 tinikwihi–na yaisi ka=mi–u ka=i?na?wi
 sing–PTCP then ACC=QUOT–FOC ACC=say
 ‘Singing, then, so they said,’
‘because they saw where they came from, so they said, singing:

♫♫Tebidzi yippe kemainakwai, su kutsu kussi monaichaide.♫♫

‘Along the edge of the true valley, the cattle emerge from the dust.’

♫♫Pabahu paa minatekwai, su kutsu kussi monaichaide.♫♫

‘Along this side of the big water, the cattle emerge from the dust.’

♫♫Taba igyatami, su kutsu kussi monaichaide.♫♫

‘Heading ever westward, the cattle emerge from the dust.’

That’s all.’

This recording of a telephone voicemail message merits interest for several reasons. First, the speaker is relatively young (in her early fifties at the time of the recording). Second, the text genre is a recent phenomenon—one side of a spontaneous (and imaginary) conversation directed to someone not present. The casual register employed here contains greetings, polite imperatives, questions, and idiomatic expressions, some of which are unique to the dialect. The informal nature of the message makes this kind of text an ideal source of material for communicative language learning. I have included it here as a brief sample of
the sort of material often missing from a documentary corpus but frequently requested by language learners wanting access to everyday speech.

(1) Ha’u eh i bea’a?
haʔu i i=piaʔa
how you my=friend
‘How are you, my friend?’

(2) Hanno eh?
hanno i
where you
‘Where are you?’

(3) Ma’na’wi ne kai himma te nakka.
maʔnaʔwi ni kai himma ti=nakka.
long.time I NEG What LOGO=hear:DUR
‘It’s been a long time that I haven’t heard anything (from you).’

(4) e oo’nosu nemate yatua siyapa ne ka . . .
i oo’nosu ni=mati Yatua siyapa ni ka
you long.ago I–PART talk:SG however I MOD
‘I heard from you a long time ago, however . . .’

(5) i:: de—i:—hayu haba pisa?
hayu haba pisa
how is. it good
‘my—my—How could I put it (well)?’

(6) i tetzakangina watsike
i=tí–tza–kàni–na watsi–kki
my=ANTIP–IP/GRASP–ring–PTCP hide–APPL
‘My phone was lost,’

(7) ne sa’a kai hauniku me te yadu’a o pinakwa
ni Ísaʔa Ikai Ihauni–ku Imi=tí=yaduʔa
I llater INEG Iwhat.kind–ACC IPL=LOGO=talk:DUR
Iu=pinakwa
Iits=following
‘so I had no way to talk with you after that (happened).’

(8) ne yaisi, uu ka . . .
ni yaisi uu ka
I then like.so MOD
‘So then, I guess . . .’
(9) owi, . . . Eugene waitu yatuasi eme yaisi e ka . . . email i gya,
ovi Eugene–wai–tu yatua–si imi yaisi i=ka=email
DEM Eugene–LOC–to talk:SG–SEQ they then your=ACC=email
i=gya
me=give
’so I called over to Eugene, and (they) . . . gave me (your) email . . .’

(10) yaisi ne yaano nabeno tewatiya’i, on the website
yaisi ni yaa–no na–bino ti–wati–ya?i
then I here–TEMP MID–also ANTIP–search–debil
on the website
on the website
‘So therefore, I’m here (really) searching on the website (knocking myself out).’

(11) yau chaisi e naniana nabo.
yau–u čaisi i=na–nia–na na–bo
here–FOC then your=MID–call–PTCP MID–write
‘I see your name here written (on the phone screen).’

(12) ha pisa tui?
ha pisa=tui
QPTC good=thusly
‘Isn’t that great!?’

(13) e sakwa i yattui!
i=sakwa i=yattui
you=MOD me=talk.to
‘You should call me!’

(14) hannano tui!
hammad=tui
when=any
‘Anytime!’

(15) tuitu ya’a
tuitu ya?a
Either here
‘either here, . . .’

(16) ya’a ‘office’ wai’yu tuitu i nobikwaitu tiwau.
yaa office–wai–?yu tuitu i=nobi–kwai–tu tiwau
here office–LOC–ABL either my=house–LOC–to also
‘either here at the office or at my house.’
(17) *seven seven five...*

(18) pisa tu’i ne e pedemayeu!
    pisa=tu?i ni i=pidi–mayi–u
    good=any I you=recent–find–PFV

    ‘I am just so glad I found you!’

(19) ene!
    ini
    INT

    ‘Take care!’

(20) ne yaisi maite nakawaipeniku ne su wene.
    ni yaisi mai–ti naka–wai–pini–ku ni=su wini
    I then DEM–LOC listen–LOC–CONT–PROSP I=EMPH stand:SG

    ‘So, then, I’m going to be listening in (waiting/expecting to hear).’

(21) i tzakangitua sa’a.
    i=tza–kanji–tua sa?a
    me=IP/GRASP–ring–IRR MOD

    ‘So, call me.’

(22) ene eniku.
    ini ini–ku
    INT say–PROSP

    ‘OK, then (so it is).’