

A Source of Conativity in Tlingit Pluractional Verbs

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Tlingit pluractional morphology

Tlingit (*Lingít* [łín'kít])

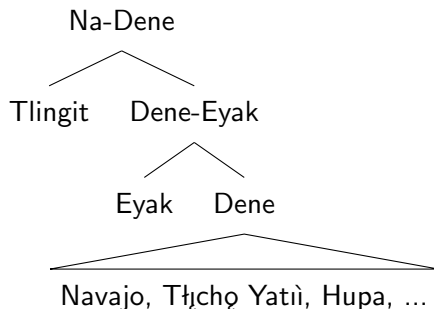


Figure: Tlingit's family tree

- About 100 fluent speakers currently. (Twitchell, 2018)
- Numerous revitalization programs, including language nest, school and university classes, adult classes. (Burge, 2024)

Tlingit country



Figure: Tlingit country in North America

Tlingit country



Figure: Dialect regions of Tlingit country

Tlingit verbs can have a lot of things in them

(1) áa teix

áa tei -x
there sleep -rep

“[s/he] sleeps there customarily” (Leer, 1976)

(2) dax ganeeltsík

dax= ga- n- i- i- l- tsík -x
dist= self.ben- imp- 2sg.s- mid- csv- roast.skewer -rep

“roast it on a skewer for yourself every time”
(Swanton, 1909)

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“the morphological marking of event plurality on verbs” (Müller & Sanchez-Mendes, 2020)

Portmanteau of “plural” + “action” due to Newman (1980).

Could be multiple actions:

- All in a row
- Spaced out over a long time
- Spread out in different places
- Spread out on different entities

(May be able to apply to states, but we will focus on events.)

Morphology depends on conjugation class

Four conjugation classes, each with its own repetitive morphology (Crippen, 2019). Examples from Eggleston (2017):

- (5) a. as.ée
“s/he is cooking it”
b. as.éex
“s/he cooks it (regularly)”

- (6) a. al'óon
“s/he is hunting”
b. yoo ayal'óonk
“s/he hunts (regularly)”

- (7) a. alshát
“s/he is holding it”
b. yei alshátch
“s/he holds it (regularly)”

- (8) a. ashí!
“s/he is singing it”
b. kei asheech
“s/he sings it (regularly)”

Tlingit pluractional examples

- (9) Aa **teix** yé awsikóo yú aanjádi.

“He knew the place where **she sleeps**, that aristocrat.”

(Swanton, 1909)

- (10) T'áa x'áanáx áwé ách **yoo aklitsákk** yú shaawaát, yú eik
katíx'ch.

“It was through a hole in the wall that **he kept poking her with it**, that girl, with that copper twist.” (Swanton, 1909)

- (11) X'éix at **téex**.

“**He gives** them things to eat.”

(Swanton, 1909)

Often translated as *regularly* or *repeatedly*.

Conative interpretation of pluractional forms

Pluractional forms interpreted as conative

Conative: verb form expressing attempting/striving to do something

- (12) a. as.ée
“[s/he] is cooking it” (Leer, 1976)
- b. as.ée~~x~~
“[s/he] is **trying** to cook it” (Leer, 1976)
- (13) a. [s/he] aat~~x~~ kéi ayawdihán
“escaped from it” (Leer, 1976)
- b. [s/he] aat~~x~~ kut kéi ayadahán~~ch~~
“is **trying** to escape” (Leer, 1976)
- (14) a. [s/he] ahóon
“is selling it” (Leer, 1976)
- b. [s/he] ~~yoo~~ ayahúnkw
“is **trying** to sell it” (Leer, 1976)

It's not just Tlingit

Cusic (1981) identifies conativity as a recurring effect of pluractionality cross-linguistically.

(15) barrar (Saho; Cusic, 1981)
“to flutter” [from *barar* “to fly”]

(16) Xinch'aracha' ri tros (Kaqchikel; Henderson, 2017)
“I kept chopping at the stump” [from *ch'ar* “split”]

(17) captāre (Latin; Wood, 2007)
“try to catch” [from *capere* “catch”]

Proposal: Pluractionality is repeated beginning

Leer hints at a connection between repetition and conativity:

(18) xaxéix

“I am trying to eat it”

“... (i.e. repeatedly undertaking the act of eating it)”

(Leer, 1991)

I generalize this to:

Proposal

A pluractional verb in Tlingit always describes a situation where several events begin, but may or may not culminate.

No agent intent required

For “true” conation (like *try*), the agent must have intent to complete the action.

Not so in Tlingit pluractionals:

- (19) a. kei awsidák
“the bad weather has lifted” (Leer, 1973)
- b. asdákkw
“it’s trying to clear up” (Leer, 1976)

Tlingit conative forms do not require agentivity. If there is a meaning of intent to finish the action, it is inferred pragmatically.

Non-culmination is not entailed

Echoes remarks by Wood (2007) and Henderson (2017) for other languages, but both authors say that non-culmination is *entailed*.

Not so in Tlingit:

- (20) a. as.ée
 “[s/he] is cooking it” (Leer, 1976)
- b. as.ée~~x~~
 “[s/he] is trying to [cook it]” (Leer, 1976)
 “**s/he cooks it (regularly)**” (Eggleston, 2017)

Tlingit conative forms do not entail non-culmination; if there is a meaning of attempts failing to culminate, it is inferred pragmatically.

Proposal (with pragmatics)

Proposal

A pluractional verb in Tlingit describes a situation where several events begin, but may or may not culminate.

This may lead to an inference that the events do not culminate, if it would be unusual to repeat the action several times completely.

This may lead to an inference that an agent wished to complete the action.

Conative and pluractional interpretations both arise from a single underspecified meaning.

Building up the conative interpretation

Tlingit verbs are made of syntax (Crippen, 2019)

(21) a. as.ée

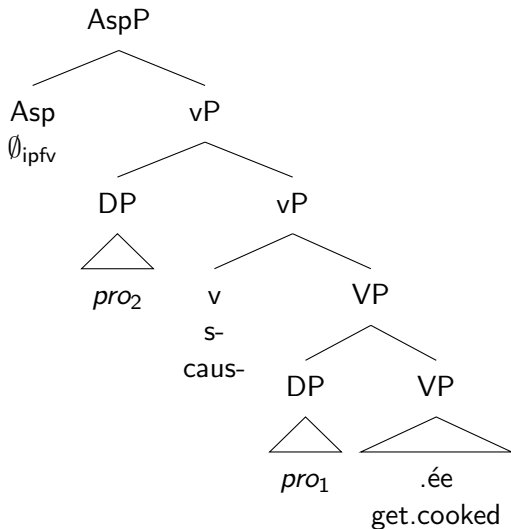
a- s- .ée

3>3- caus- get.cooked

“[s/he] is cooking it”

(Leer, 1976)

Tlingit verbs are made of syntax (Crippen, 2019)



Tlingit verbs are made of syntax (Crippen, 2019)

$[_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} [_{vP} s.ée]]$

(22) as.ée

a- s- .ée
3>3- caus- get.cooked

“[s/he] is cooking it”

(Leer, 1976)

Tlingit verbs are made of syntax (Crippen, 2019)

$$\begin{array}{c} [AspP \ \emptyset_{ipfv} \ [_{vP} \ [_{vP} \ \text{s.ée} \ \text{-}\underline{x} \] \]] \\ \text{or} \\ [AspP \ [AspP \ \emptyset_{ipfv} \ [_{vP} \ \text{s.ée} \] \] \ \text{-}\underline{x} \] \end{array}$$

(23) as.éex

a- s- .ée -x
3>3- caus- get.cooked -rep

“[s/he] is trying to [cook it]”
“s/he cooks it (regularly)”

(Leer, 1976)
(Eggleston, 2017)

How to go from “cook” to “repeatedly start cooking”?

$$\begin{aligned} & [AspP \ \emptyset_{ipfv} \ [_{vP} \ [_{vP} \ \text{s.ée}] \ \text{-}\underline{x}]] \\ & \quad \text{or} \\ & [AspP \ [AspP \ \emptyset_{ipfv} \ [_{vP} \ \text{s.ée}]] \ \text{-}\underline{x}] \end{aligned}$$

Either way, somehow

$$\llbracket [_{vP} \ \text{s.ée}] \rrbracket = \{ \text{cooking events} \}$$

$$\llbracket [AspP \ \emptyset_{ipfv} \ \text{s.ée} \ \text{-}\underline{x}] \rrbracket = \{ \text{runs of several partial cooking events} \}$$

How to go from “cook” to “repeatedly start cooking”?

- Verb is lexically culminating:
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{culminating cooking events} \}$

Then either...

- -x says “...and several **beginnings** of such events take place,” or
 - Imperfective creates a set of **partial cooking events**, and then -x says “...and several such events take place”
- Verb is lexically non-culminating:
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{not-necessarily-culminating cooking events} \}$
 - In this case, -x can say “...and several such events take place”

How to go from “cook” to “repeatedly start cooking”?

- Verb is lexically culminating:
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{culminating cooking events} \}$

Then either...

- -~~x~~ says “...and several **beginnings** of such events take place,” or
 - Imperfective creates a set of **partial cooking events**, and then -~~x~~ says “...and several such events take place” ← **NOT THIS!**
- Verb is lexically non-culminating:
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{not-necessarily-culminating cooking events} \}$
 - In this case, -~~x~~ can say “...and several such events take place”

Imperfective aspect can't do it all

Non-culmination from imperfective aspect?

Imperfective aspect in many languages describes events that may not culminate. Could it be doing that here?

$$\llbracket [_{vP} \text{ l.úk }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{cooking events} \}$$
$$\llbracket [_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} [_{vP} \text{ l.úk }]] \rrbracket = \{ \text{partial cooking events} \}$$
$$\llbracket [_{AspP} [_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} \text{ l.úk }] -\text{x}] \rrbracket = \{ \text{runs of several partial cooking events} \}$$

Some verbs cannot be imperfective

- (24) a. Táax'aa xwaaják.
táax'aa x- wa- a- ják
mosquito 1sg.s- pfv- stv- kill
"I killed a mosquito." (Crippen, 2019)
- b. *Táax'aa xaják.
táax'aa xa- ják
mosquito 1sg.s- kill
intended: "I kill mosquitoes.", "I am killing a mosquito." (Crippen, 2019)

It seems that imperfective aspect requires durative verbs (c.f. Wilhelm, 2007, on Dëne Sų́líné) - cannot combine with **achievements**.

Achievements can be imperfective when pluractional

(25) Táax'aa xajákx.

táax'aa x̣a- jáḳ -x̣
mosquito 1sg.s- kill -rep

"I repeatedly kill mosquitoes."

(Crippen, 2019)

Non-durative events in other languages can be treated as durative when repeated:

(26) Mary was coughing. (Dölling, 2014)

(27) John discovered fleas on his dog for six weeks.
(Dowty, 1979)

It seems that the pluractional creates durativity.

Achievements can be conative when pluractional

(28) al.úkx

a- l- .úk -x
3>3- caus- boil -rep

“[s/he] is boiling it, trying to boil - bring to a boil” (Leer, 1976)

(29) aklayés'x

a- k- la- yés' -x
3>3- qual- caus- discolor -rep

“[s/he is] trying to color it” (Leer, 1976)

Imperfective can't derive partial events from achievements

Let's try to use imperfective to derive conative *al.úk*~~x~~:

$\llbracket [_{vP} \text{ l.úk }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{bringing-to-a-boil events} \}$

$\llbracket [_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} [_{vP} \text{ l.úk }]] \rrbracket = \{ \text{partial bringing-to-a-boil events} \}$

$\llbracket [_{AspP} [_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} \text{ l.úk }] -\text{x}] \rrbracket = \{ \text{runs of several partial} \\ \text{bringing-to-a-boil events} \}$

Imperfective can't derive partial events from achievements

Let's try to use imperfective to derive conative *al.úk*x:

$\llbracket [_{vP} \text{ l.úk }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{bringing-to-a-boil events} \}$

$\llbracket [_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} [_{vP} \text{ l.úk }]] \rrbracket = \{ \text{partial bringing-to-a-boil events} \}$

$\llbracket [_{AspP} [_{AspP} \emptyset_{ipfv} \text{ l.úk }] -\underline{x}] \rrbracket = \{ \text{runs of several partial} \\ \text{bringing-to-a-boil events} \}$

How to go from “cook” to “repeatedly start cooking”?

- Verb is lexically culminating:
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{culminating cooking events} \}$

Then either...

- ~~-x~~ says “...and several beginnings of such events take place”, or
- ~~Imperfective creates a set of partial cooking events, and then~~
~~-x says “...and several such events take place”~~
- Verb is lexically non-culminating
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{not-necessarily-culminating cooking events} \}$
 - In this case, ~~-x~~ can say “...and several such events take place”

Implications for eventuality class

Lexically non-durative and non-culminating?

If verbs are lexically non-culminating, this includes achievements.

If so, culmination cannot be simply reaching the end of a runtime or a scale - it must be a separate sub-event (c.f. Romance defeasible causatives; Martin, 2019).

Potentially analogous to the swatting and dying in (30) - two separate events, each instantaneous.

(30) Susan swatted the fly dead.

Runup achievements?

If verbs are lexically culminating, perhaps pluractional achievements are coerced to *runup achievements* (Croft, 2012), like in (31).

(31) Susan is winning the race.

Tlingit progressive aspect can do this:

(32) yaa n_xaják

yaa= n- xa- ják
along= prog- 1sg.s- kill

“I am [in the process of] killing him/her/it” (Eggleston, 2017)

Maybe pluractional -_x demands a preparatory phase, triggering similar coercion. (Why can't imperfective do this?)

Summary

Summary

- Tlingit pluractional forms denote repeated events that don't necessarily culminate, and this gives conative interpretations.
- Either Tlingit verbs are lexically non-culminating, or the pluractional suffix functions as a partitive operator in addition to a pluractional.
- Either way, this has implications for event structure and eventuality class.

Epilogue: Other Pluractional Suffixes

Several other Tlingit verbal suffixes seem to add repetitious meaning, but seem to be restricted to specific semantic classes of verbs.

- *-t* for targeting/aiming
as in *xa.únt* “I repeatedly shoot it”, “I am repeatedly shooting it [with a gun]” (Crippen, 2019)
- *-t'* for creation/destruction
as in *a xoo aa láxwt'* “Some among them are starving to death.” (Swanton, 1909)
- *-x'* for verbs acting on multiple entities
as in *díyát'x'* “[Several things] are long - are very long” (Leer, 1976)
- *-s'* for repeated action with cumulative effect
as in *ayálaneis' áwé a wán*. “He repeatedly rubs it, its edge. [sharpening a blade]” (Swanton, 1909)

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Summary

- Tlingit pluractional forms denote repeated events that don't necessarily culminate, and this gives conative interpretations.
- Either Tlingit verbs are lexically non-culminating, or the pluractional suffix functions as a partitive operator.
- Either way, this has implications for event structure and eventuality class.

Thank you all for listening!

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