

A Source of Conativity in Tlingit Pluractional Verbs

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Canadian Linguistics Association Conference
June 17, 2024
Carleton University

Table of Contents

1. Tlingit pluractional morphology
2. Conative interpretation of pluractional forms
3. Building up the conative interpretation
4. Pluractionals are below aspect
5. Implications for eventuality classes
6. Summary

Tlingit pluractional morphology

Tlingit (*Lingít* [łín'kít])

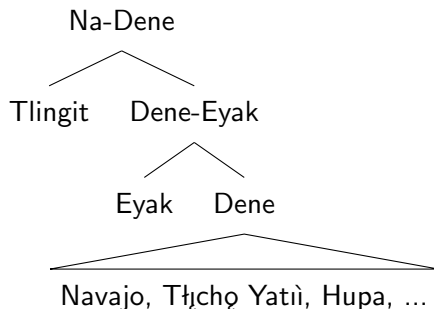


Figure: Tlingit's family tree

- 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
distr= self.ben- imp- 2sg.s- mid- caus- 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)

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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 pluractional 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 aanyädi.

“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)

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Leer hints at a connection between repetition and conativity:

(19) 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:

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

No agent intent required

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

Not so in Tlingit pluractionals:

- (21) a. kei awsidák
“the bad weather has lifted” (Leer, 1973)
- b. asdák*kw*
“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:

- (22) 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)

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Not so in Tlingit:

- (23) 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)

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

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

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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)

(24) a. as.ée

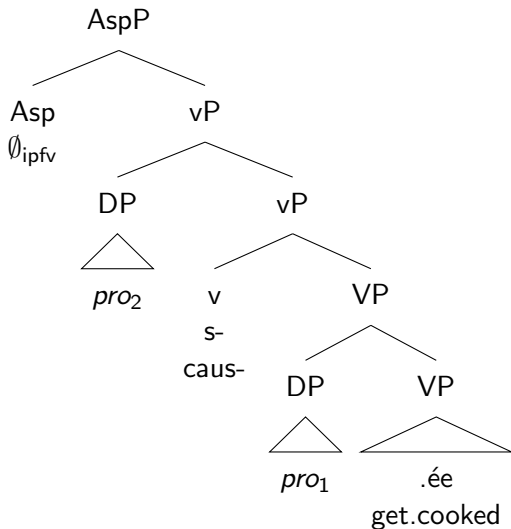
a- s- .ée

3>3- caus- get.cooked

“[s/he] is cooking it”

(Leer, 1976)

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

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

(26) 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)

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

(27) 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)

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}$$

(28) 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...

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- -x says “...and several **beginnings** of such events take place,” or

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- Imperfective creates a set of **partial cooking events**, and then
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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:
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{not-necessarily-culminating cooking events} \}$

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 - In this case, -x can say “...and several such events take place”

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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”

Pluractionals are below aspect

Non-culmination from imperfective aspect?

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

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

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

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

Some verbs cannot be imperfective

(29) 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."

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Some verbs cannot be imperfective

- (30) a. Táax'aa xwaaják.
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“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

(31) Táax'aa xajákx.

táax'aa xa- ják -x
mosquito 1sg.s- kill -rep

"I repeatedly kill mosquitoes."

(Crippen, 2019)

Achievements can be imperfective when pluractional

(34) Táax'aa xajákx.

táax'aa xa- ják -x
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"I repeatedly kill mosquitoes."

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Non-durative events in other languages are durative when repeated:

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

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

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Pluractional likely creates the durativity necessary for imperfective aspect.

Achievements can be conative when pluractional

(40) 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)

(41) 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~~:

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

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

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

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- ~~-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
 $\llbracket [_{VP} \text{ s.ée }] \rrbracket = \{ \text{not-necessarily-culminating cooking events} \}$
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Implications for eventuality classes

Lexically non-durative and non-culminating?

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

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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).

Lexically non-durative and non-culminating?

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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 (42) - two separate events, related by causation, each instantaneous.

(44) Susan swatted the fly dead.

Runup achievements?

If verbs are lexically culminating, perhaps pluractional achievements are coerced to *runup achievements* (Croft, 2012), like in (45).

(45) Susan is winning the race.

Runup achievements?

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(47) Susan is winning the race.

Tlingit progressive aspect can do this:

(48) yaa n_xaják

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

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

Runup achievements?

If verbs are lexically culminating, perhaps pluractional achievements are coerced to *runup achievements* (Croft, 2012), like in (45).

(49) Susan is winning the race.

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Runup achievements?

If verbs are lexically culminating, perhaps pluractional achievements are coerced to *runup achievements* (Croft, 2012), like in (45).

(51) Susan is winning the race.

Tlingit progressive aspect can do this:

(52) yaa n~~x~~aják

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

- 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.



This work was supported by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec.

Thank you to James Crippen, Bernhard Schwarz, and Seth Cable for innumerable helpful comments.

Thank you to Alex Ito and Phoenix Gee-Benwell for data help.

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.
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Thank you all for listening!

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