

A Source of Conativity in Tlingit Pluractional Verbs

Laurestine Bradford

TOM 16

May 11, 2024

University of Toronto

Table of Contents

1. Tlingit pluractional morphology
2. Conative interpretation of pluractional forms
3. Building up the conative interpretation
4. Imperfective aspect can't do it all
5. Implications for eventuality class
6. Summary

Tlingit pluractional morphology

Tlingit (*Lingít* [łín'kít])

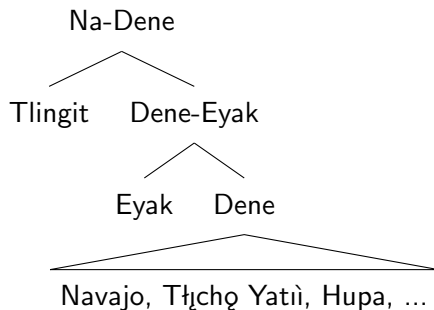


Figure: Tlingit's family tree

- About 100 fluent speakers currently. (Twitchell, 2018)
- Numerous revitalization programs - language nest, school and university classes, Yukon Native Language Centre adult classes, and more. (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)

Tlingit verbs can have a lot of things in them

(3) áa teix

áa tei -x
there sleep -rep

“[s/he] sleeps there customarily”

(Leer, 1976)

(4) dax ganeeltsíkx

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)

“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

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) 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)

- (10) Aa **teix** yé awsikóo yú aanǰádi.

“He knew the place where **she sleeps**, that aristocrat.”
(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
“is cooking it” (Leer, 1976)
- b. as.éex
“is **trying** to cook it” (Leer, 1976)
- (13) a. aatx kéi ayawdihán
“escaped (from it)” (Leer, 1976)
- b. aatx kut kéi ayadahánch
“is **trying** to escape” (Leer, 1976)
- (14) a. ahóon
“is selling it” (Leer, 1976)
- b. 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”

literally: “I am repeatedly undertaking the act of eating it”
(Leer, 1991)

I generalize this to:

Proposal

A pluractional verb in Tlingit 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. 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 distinct: both authors say that non-culmination is *entailed*.

Not so in Tlingit:

- (20) a. as.ée
 “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

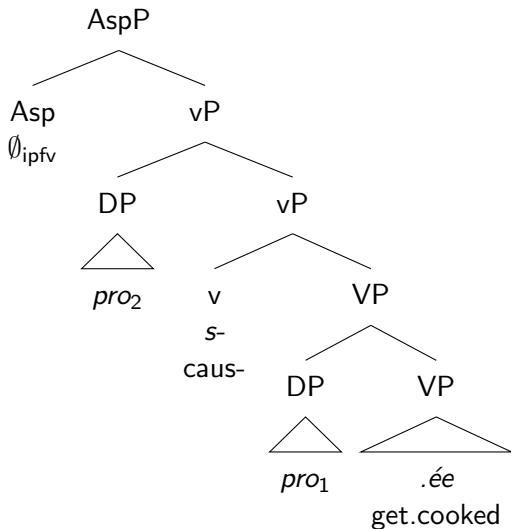
a- s- .ée

3>3- caus- get.cooked

“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

“is cooking it”

(Leer, 1976)

Verbs are made up of smaller parts, so their meanings should be, too.

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...

- $-\underline{x}$ says “...and several **beginnings** of such events take place”, or
 - Imperfective creates a set of **partial cooking events**, and then \underline{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, $-\underline{x}$ 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...

- $-\underline{x}$ says “...and several **beginnings** of such events take place”, or
- Imperfective creates a set of **partial cooking events**, and then \underline{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, $-\underline{x}$ 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 expresses 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 is likely that imperfective aspect requires durative verbs (c.f. Wilhelm, 2007, on Dëne Sų́líné), and cannot combine with **achievements**.

Achievements can be imperfective when pluractional

(25) Táax'aa xajáx.

táax'aa x̣a- jáx
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)

So it seems the pluractional creates durativity.

Achievements can be conative when pluractional

(28) al.úkx

a- l- .úk -x
3>3- caus- boil -rep

“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

“trying to color it” (Leer, 1976)

Imperfective can't derive partial events from achievements

Let's see how this would work for *al.úk*_x:

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

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

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

Imperfective can't derive partial events from achievements

Let's see how this would work for *al.úk*_x:

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

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

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

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...

- $-\underline{x}$ says “...and several beginnings of such events take place”, or
- ~~Imperfective creates a set of partial cooking events, and then $-\underline{x}$ 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, $-\underline{x}$ 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. Culmination 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, we have another option: perhaps they are coerced to *runup achievements* (Croft, 2012), like (31).

(31) Susan is winning the race.

Tlingit progressive aspect can do this:

(32) yaa n_xaják (Eggleston, 2017)

yaa= n- x_a- jak
along= prog- 1sg.s- kill

“I am killing him/her/it”

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.
- Either way, this has implications for event structure.

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)



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.
- Either way, this has implications for event structure.

Thank you all for listening!

- Burge, H. D. (2024). *Woosh jín toolshát yeisú, we're still holding each other's hands: relationships and revitalization in Lingít country* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia). doi: 10.14288/1.0439964
- Crippen, J. A. (2019). *The syntax in Tlingit verbs* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia). doi: 10.14288/1.0388221
- Croft, W. (2012, 03). The aspectual structure of events. In *Verbs: Aspect and Causal Structure*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199248582.003.0002> doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199248582.003.0002
- Cusic, D. D. (1981). *Verbal plurality and aspect* (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University). Retrieved from <https://lib.ugent.be/catalog/rug01:003027268>

- Dölling, J. (2014). Aspectual coercion and eventuality structure. In K. Robering (Ed.), *Events, Arguments, and Aspects: Topics in the Semantics of Verbs* (pp. 189–226). John Benjamins. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.152.05dol> doi: 10.1075/slcs.152.05dol
- Dowty, D. R. (1979). *Word meaning and Montague grammar*. Springer Netherlands. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-9473-7> doi: 10.1007/978-94-009-9473-7
- Eggleston, K. (2017). *Online Tlingit verb dictionary: A database of over 1,100 conjugated Tlingit verbs*. Retrieved from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/~{}tlingitverbs/> (Unpublished online resource)

- Henderson, R. (2017). Swarms: Spatiotemporal grouping across domains. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 35, 161–203. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-016-9334-z> doi: 10.1007/s11049-016-9334-z
- Leer, J. (1973). *Tlingit stem collection*. Retrieved from <https://www.uaf.edu/anla/record.php?identifier=TL962L1975n> (Unpublished manuscript, ANLA ID:TL962L1975n)
- Leer, J. (1976). *Tlingit verb catalog*. Retrieved from <https://www.uaf.edu/anla/record.php?identifier=TL962L1974h> (Unpublished manuscript, ANLA ID:TL962L1974h)

References IV

- Leer, J. (1991). *The schetic categories of the Tlingit verb* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago). Retrieved from <https://www.uaf.edu/anla/record.php?identifier=TL962L1991> (ANLA ID:TL962L1991)
- Martin, F. (2019). Non-culminating accomplishments. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 13(8), e12346. Retrieved from <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/lnc3.12346> (e12346 10.1111/lnc3.12346) doi: 10.1111/lnc3.12346
- Müller, A., & Sanchez-Mendes, L. (2020). Pluractionality. In *The Wiley Blackwell companion to semantics* (pp. 1–34). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118788516.sem134> doi: 10.1002/9781118788516.sem134

- Newman, P. (1980). *The classification of chadic within afroasiatic*. Universitaire Pers.
- Swanton, J. R. (1909). *Tlingit myths and texts*. U.S. Government Printing Office. (ANLA ID:TL901S1909)
- Twitchell, L. A. (2018). *Haa Dachxhánx'i Sáani Kagéiyi Yís: Haa Yoo Xh'atángi kei Naltseen, for our little grandchildren: Language revitalization among the Tlingit*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i at Hilo.
- Wilhelm, A. L. (2007). *Telicity and durativity: A study of aspect in Dëne Suliné (Chipewyan) and German*. Routledge. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203943908> doi: 10.4324/9780203943908
- Wood, E. (2007). *The semantic typology of pluractionality* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2hc3b5pb>