

# Revisiting Tlingit Noun Derivation

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## 1 Introduction

Na-Dené (a.k.a. Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit) languages are famous for their verb morphology. The Tlingit language is no exception, with its remarkably complex verb prefix system that breaks a number of supposed morphological universals such as the ordering of inflectional and derivational prefixes. Unfortunately the attraction of charting the verbal wilderness in Na-Dené languages has led to a lack of exploration of nominal morphology.<sup>1</sup>

Tlingit has been relatively little studied by linguists. Initial attempts at analyzing Tlingit grammar include Swanton (1911) and Boas (1917). Fifty years passed with no further work on syntax or morphology, although some work was done on phylogenetic relationships (Goddard, 1920) and historical phonology (Pinnow, 1962). Story (1966) was the first modern analysis of Tlingit morphology, although her work was mostly focused on the verb, with only about 12 of 208 pages given over to nominal morphology. Tlingit morphology was essentially unvisited for another twenty-five years until Leer (1991), whose groundbreaking dissertation on the tense, aspect, mood, voice, and evidentiality<sup>2</sup> of the Tlingit verb included a substantial reanalysis of verbal morphology, although at times given with rather opaque explanation. As Leer explicitly studied the verb in this work, the noun again received little treatment, however he did present a solid analysis of nominal cases and possession.

Returning to Story's (1966) morphological analysis, she gives five processes of noun derivation. The first she left unnamed, but it apparently lacks morpho-

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<sup>1</sup>I have a citation for this from Keren Rice somewhere but I can't find it right now.

<sup>2</sup>Leer collects all of these together into what he calls the "schetic" categories.

logical indication of derivation, and as such is usually termed conversion. The other four are, in her terminology, the agentive suffix *-i<sub>5</sub>*, the instrumental suffix *-aa*, the patientive suffix *-adi*, and the fragmentive suffix *-dasi*. In this paper I revisit Story's examples of each of these, reanalyzing them in terms of what is now known of Tlingit morphology. Hopefully this reanalysis will provide a framework for future exploration of noun derivational morphology.

## 2 Language sketch

Tlingit (Eng. [ˈklɪŋkʰɪt], Tl. *Lingít* [ʰɪŋkʰɪtʰ]) is a Na-Dené language spoken in Southeast Alaska and parts of the Yukon Territories and British Columbia. Like most North American indigenous languages, it is highly endangered, with 300–400 fluent speakers almost all over the age of 60.<sup>3</sup> Tlingit is an ergative SOV language which marks nouns for case and possession, but not gender. Nouns are classed as alienable or inalienable, based largely on obligatory possession. The noun phrase may be marked for number but usually is not, except for human relation terms – grandparent, child, man, etc. – which have mandatory plural forms. Whether or not an argument is marked for plurality, the verb marks number for its arguments or for the action itself, with certain verbs having suppletive plural or collective roots. The verb is, like all Na-Dené languages, characterized by a large additive set of prefixes and suffixes which are attached to a verb stem formed from a root and classifier prefix, and all parts of the verb undergo complex context-dependent phonological changes.

The morphological analyses given in this paper are based in a system quite different from that used by Story. This current descriptive system is an outgrowth of the one presented by Leer (1991) in his PhD dissertation. Cable (2004) gave a reanalysis of the verb prefix template which has been adopted in this paper. Noun cases are those originally given by Leer but with names adjusted to be in line with wider usage.

The Tlingit verb is usually analyzed according to a template morphology with fifteen prefix slots and five suffix slots surrounding a verb root. As shown in table 1, the slots are numbered outwards from the verb root which is zero, the prefixes taking a positive number and the suffixes taking a negative number. Thus the innermost prefix slot closest to the root, the classifier, is labeled +1, and the outermost prefix slot, the adverbial proclitics, is labeled +15. There

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<sup>3</sup>Personal estimate based on information from Sealaska Heritage Institute, personal experience, and estimates from community informants.

Slot	Description
+15	adverbial proclitics
+14	reciprocal woosh
+13	3rd person subject number agreement
+12	object agreement
+11	unreduced incorporated nouns
+10	reduced incorporated nouns
+9	theme prefix <i>ya</i>
+8	theme prefix <i>ka</i>
+7	outer aspect conjugations
+6	irrealis
+5	inner aspect conjugations
+4	aspect
+3	distributive
+2	subject agreement
+1	classifier
0	root
-1	derivation
-2	duration
-3	inner modes
-4	outer modes
-5	epimodes

Table 1: Structure of the Tlingit verb template

are problems with a template analysis of Athabaskan verbs, as detailed by Rice (2000) and Bird (2001), but for the sake of simplicity I will ignore them.

As with the Athabaskan languages (Rice, 2000, p. 9 ff.), the Tlingit verb tends to violate a number of widely held morphological expectations – the template structure is baroque, inflectional morphemes are intermixed with derivational ones, dependencies between morphemes are discontinuous and complex, and morpheme ordering is variable and opaque. In addition Tlingit has a large set of phonological rules that contract or otherwise modify verb affixes, as outlined by Leer (1991, ch. 5). It is for these reasons among others that the Tlingit verb has fascinated linguists and has led to little work covering the noun.

The verb classifier in particular deserves some discussion. The classifier<sup>4</sup> in

<sup>4</sup>Story and Naish called this morpheme an “extensor”, however more recent work on Tlingit has returned to the usage common among linguists working on the Athabaskan languages.

Tlingit is not strictly a verb classifier, but is instead a prefix attached to the verb root which indicates various qualities of the verb such as valency, argument form, aspect, and agreement with other prefixes, as well as argument classifications such as physical shape and internal complexity. It could be called the zenith of portmanteau morphemes as it encodes a complex and somewhat variable set of qualities in a single indivisible morpheme.

S	+D		-D	
	-I	+I	-I	+I
$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$ -	ya-	da-	di-
<b>l</b>	la-	li-	dl-	dli-
<b>s</b>	sa-	si-	s-	dzi-
<b>sh</b>	sha-	shi-	sh-	ji-

Table 2: Tlingit classifier space C

The Tlingit verb classifier at slot +1 can be considered a function of three dimensions,  $CL : (S \times D \times I) \rightarrow C$ . This three dimensional classifier space C is diagrammed in table 2. The S-dimension – what Leer (1991) calls the “series component” – is one of four basic consonants which may undergo further perturbation. These are the set  $S = \{\emptyset, l, s, sh\}$ . The other two are the D-dimension  $D = \{+D, -D\}$  and the I-dimension  $I = \{+I, -I\}$ . Roughly, the S-dimension value determines the central consonant, the D-dimension determines the existence of <d> in the consonant cluster, and the I-dimension determines the use of <i> versus some other vowel. Thus the classifier function maps the space C of sixteen different classifier prefixes, represented by  $CL(s \in S, d \in \pm D, i \in \pm I)$ . In abstract verb themes the lowercase variables are used to show an unspecified value. The “CL” is usually omitted to save space in glosses.

The values of each of the classifier arguments indicate diverse grammatical functions or agreement with other morphemes of the verb. For example, +D is required in the classifier for antipassives, self-benefactives, dissimulatives,<sup>5</sup> agreement with the indefinite human subject prefix, agreement with the reflexive object prefix, agreement with certain thematic prefixes, and other inflectional and derivational qualia (Leer, 1991, p. 96).

<sup>5</sup>I.e. a mode which indicates pretending to do something.

## 2.1 Conventions

This paper uses the “e-mail” orthography for Tlingit.<sup>6</sup> This is a modified form of the Naish-Story orthography used since the 1970s, where the underscore diacritic indicating uvular consonants is replaced with a digraph of the velar consonant and <h>. The orthography is given with IPA equivalents in tables 3 and 4 below.

Long/Tense		Short/Lax	
ee [i:]	oo [u:]	i [ɪ]	u [ʊ]
ei [e:]		e [ɛ]	
	aa [a:]		a [ʌ]

Table 3: Vowels in the Tlingit e-mail orthography

An acute accent over a vowel – e.g. <á> – indicates high tone and no accent – e.g. <a> – indicates low tone. The vowel [a:] may have an allophone [ɔ:] under the influence of rounding or a preceding uvular consonant, but this is not consistent among all speakers. Word-initial vowels are preceded by a glottal stop; this is not reflected in the orthography. The Tongass Tlingit dialect featured a toneless system with four vowel distinctions between plain, long, glottalized, and fading (Leer, 1979), however this dialect has recently become extinct, and as such is not reflected in the orthography. Also the Sanya-Henya dialect has a tone register system with a four-way distinction between high, unmarked, low, and falling tone; these are not reflected in the orthography because Sanya-Henya speakers are few in number and the dialect is mutually intelligible with other dialects.

d [t]	dz [ts]	j [tʃ]	dl [tɬ]	g [k]	gw [kʷ]	gh [q]	ghw [qʷ]		
t [tʰ]	ts [tsʰ]	ch [tʃʰ]	tl [tɬʰ]	k [kʰ]	kw [kʰʷ]	kh [qʰ]	khw [qʰʷ]		
t' [tʰ]	ts' [tsʰ]	ch' [tʃʰ]	tl' [tɬʰ]	k' [kʰ]	k'w [kʰʷ]	kh' [qʰ]	kh'w [qʰʷ]	.	[ʔ]
	s [s]	sh [ʃ]	l [ɬ]	x [x]	xw [xʷ]	xh [χ]	xhw [χʷ]	h	[h]
	s' [sʰ]		l' [ɬʰ]	x' [xʰ]	x'w [xʰʷ]	xh' [χʰ]	xh'w [χʰʷ]		
n [n]			y [j]	w [w]					

Table 4: Consonants in the Tlingit e-mail orthography

<sup>6</sup>See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlingit\\_alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlingit_alphabet) for more information about the various Tlingit orthographies.

The Interior Tlingit dialects spoken in Canada have a consonant <m> [m] which replaces <w>, and a consonant <ll> [l] which may vary with <n>. These are occasionally seen in writings from Canadian speakers, but will not be used here.

In abstract morpheme glosses the consonant <ÿ> [ÿ] is used. This existed historically but has all but disappeared except among some conservative speakers in the Yakutat area. This consonant is today realized as <w> in rounded environments, e.g. <ÿu>→<wu>, and otherwise as <y>, e.g. <ÿa>→<ya>. It can also merge with certain other consonants to produce rounded forms of those consonants, e.g. <xha>+<ÿu>→<xhwa>, a major factor in the opacity of verb affix contractions.

Note that in this paper the IPA glottal stop symbol <ʔ> is used rather than <.> for clarity in glosses.

Many abbreviations used in this paper are uncommon or atypical due to the exigencies of Tlingit grammar. Table 5 summarizes the abbreviations used herein, however common ones – e.g. 1PL.OBJ – are omitted.

Abbrev.	Description
ATEL	atelic aspect (+5 inner aspect conjugation)
ATTR	attributive suffix
DIR	directional proclitic (+15 adverbial proclitic)
FRAG	fragmentive suffix
FREQ	frequentive suffix
IDFH	indefinite human (+12 object agreement, +2 subject agreement)
IDFN	indefinite non-human (+12 object agreement, +2 subject agreement)
INSTV	instrumentive suffix
KTHM	<i>ka</i> theme prefix (+8), derived from noun <i>ka</i> “surface, top”
PAT	patientive suffix
PF	perfective aspect (+4)
PROG	progressive aspect (+5 inner aspect conjugation)
PERT	pertingent case
RFLX	reflexive (+12 subject agreement)
REP	repetitive suffix
YTHM	<i>ya</i> theme prefix (+9), derived from noun <i>ya</i> “face, front”

Table 5: Gloss abbreviations

### 3 Conversion

The first derivational form described by Story is conversion. It is unique among the derivational forms in that there is no explicit derivational morphology which clearly differentiates the nominal form from an ordinary verb form. However the converted form may be used in noun position in sentences, and may take case or possession.

- (1) a. atxhá  
at- $\emptyset$ -xha  
IDFN.OBJ-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-eat  
“food”
- b. yoo xh'atánk  
yoo=xh'a- $\emptyset$ -taan-k  
DIR=mouth-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-carry-REP  
“word, speech, language”
- c. tundatáan  
tu-na-da-taan  
inside-PROG-( $\emptyset$ , +D, -I)-carry  
“thought”
- d. ghagaan  
gha- $\emptyset$ -gaan  
ATEL-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-shine  
“sun”
- e. kagán  
ka- $\emptyset$ -gaan  
KTHM-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-shine  
“shine” (noun)
- f. sh kalneek  
sh-ka-l-neek-  
RFLX.OBJ-KTHM-(l, -D, -I)-tell  
“story, tale”, “something said”

The most notable characteristic of all of the examples in (1) is that they all have -I in the classifier. Most of Story's examples are  $\emptyset$  series classifiers, but even (1f) which is an l series classifier is still -I. This is interesting because for the unmarked form of a verb, the imperfective impersonal indicative typically used as a citation form, the classifier is normally +I. For the  $\emptyset$  series the unmarked +I

classifier is *ya-* with ( $\emptyset$ , -D, +I), and for the l series it is *li-* with (l, -D, +I). Thus -I must be specified to produce the  $\emptyset$  series classifier in its zero form; the same applies to the other classifier series along the S-dimension.

A cursory review of the Naish-Story noun dictionary (Naish *et al.*, 1976) gave no other conversionally derived nouns which had +I. Given this it may be possible that -I is an obligatory restriction for a conversional derivation, although further analysis is necessary to firmly support this conclusion. If true, this indicates that in Tlingit there appear to be some morphological changes required for the verb before it is converted.

## 4 Attributive

Story gives the “agentive” suffix *-i<sub>5</sub>* as a derivational suffix applied to verbs which produces an agentive form similar to the use of the English derivational suffix *-er*. As indicated by the subscript, this is one of a number of homophonous verb suffixes proposed by Story. The data she analyzed are interesting because some seem inconsistent with the traditional idea of an agentive suffix. Below are the reanalyzed examples from Story (1966).

- (2) a. kashxeedi  
 ka-sh-xeet-*yi*  
 KTHM-(sh, -D, -I)-scratch-ATTR  
 “writer, secretary”, “(one) who writes”
- b. yoo xh'atangi  
 yoo=xh'a- $\emptyset$ -taan-k-*yi*  
 DIR=mouth-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-carry-REP-ATTR  
 “word, speech, language”, “(one) who speaks”
- c. at wuskóowu  
 at-*yü*-sa-ku-*yi*  
 IDFN.OBJ-PF-(s, -D, -I)-know-ATTR  
 “(one) who knows it”
- d. datóowu  
 da-tu-*yi*  
 ( $\emptyset$ , +D, -I)-read-ATTR  
 “reader, (one) who reads”
- e. at úndi  
 at- $\emptyset$ -*ʔunt-*yi**  
 IDFN.OBJ-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-shoot-ATTR

- “shooter, (one) who shoots it”
- f. at xháshdi  
 at- $\emptyset$ -xhasht- $\ddot{y}$ i  
 IDFN.OBJ-( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-cut-ATTR  
 “leather”
- g. éil'xhi  
 [ $\emptyset$ -[éil'-xh]]- $\ddot{y}$ i  
 [( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-[salt-PERT]]-ATTR  
 “salted fish”
- h. óos'i  
 $\emptyset$ -us'- $\ddot{y}$ i  
 ( $\emptyset$ , -D, -I)-wash-ATTR  
 “laundry”
- i. kawultéís'i  
 ka- $\ddot{y}$ u-l-teis'- $\ddot{y}$ i  
 KTHM-PF-(l, -D, -I)-squishy-ATTR  
 “squishy (thing)”, “squishy potatos”

Tlingit has a very small closed class of adjectives, so for adjectival descriptions which are not covered by members of this class the attributive form of the verb is used. Thus *lighéiyi lingít* “tall person”, schematically [(l, -D, +I)-tall-ATTR person]. For situations where the complement of the attributive verb is anaphoric or indeterminate, Tlingit uses the generic nouns *at* “thing” and *khaa* “person” to which attributives are applied, for example *licháni at* “stinky thing”, schematically [(l, -D, +I)-stink-'-ATTR thing].

Story recognized that the agentive suffix was phonologically similar to the attributive and several other suffixes, hence her use of subscripts to differentiate them. However she may have been led to overspecialization through such an analysis. The term “agentive” is appropriate for (2a)–(2e) where there is clearly an agent role. However it seems inappropriate for (2f)–(2i) where the result lacks an agent role. I argue that this problem can be resolved by simply treating the suffix as identical to the attributive, and leaving the thematic role to lexical specification.

However a problem still remains with claiming that this derivational suffix is identical to the attributive, namely that the attributive requires a noun or noun phrase as a complement. This problem is easily solved by noting that the noun phrase may optionally be null, as in (3).



It should also be noted that as with the conversional derivations, the classifier is always -I in all of these derivational forms. As will be seen in the examples for the other derivations this continues to hold true. Thus we may generalize the hypothesis to state that all forms require -I in the classifier for derivation.

## 5 Instrumentive

The third derivational form that Story describes is the “instrumental” *-aa* suffix, here called “instrumentive” to distinguish it from the instrumental-comitative case. This suffix is phonologically similar to the partitive pronominal object agreement verb prefix *aa-* (Leer, 1991, p. 128),<sup>7</sup> and to the noun *á* “one, it” which is *áa* with both locative and possessed suffixes (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 2002a, p. 11).<sup>8</sup>

- (4) a. táax'aa  
 Ø-taax'-aa  
 (Ø, -D, -I)-bite-INSTV  
 “mosquito”
- b. óonaa  
 Ø-ʔun-aa  
 (Ø, -D, -I)-shoot-INSTV  
 “gun”
- c. óoxjaa  
 Ø-ʔux-ch-aa  
 (Ø, -D, -I)-blow-FREQ-INSTV  
 “wind”
- d. kuxídaa  
 ka-Ø-xeet-aa  
 ΚΤΗΜ-(Ø, -D, -I)-scratch-INSTV  
 “pencil”
- e. khaashaxáshaa  
 khaa-sha-Ø-xaash-aa  
 IDFH.OBJ-head-(Ø, -D, -I)-cut-INSTV

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<sup>7</sup>Per Leer (1991, p. 59) this can specify a partitive subject as well as an object, however the other prefixes in slot +12 all serve for object agreement.

<sup>8</sup>The underlying forms are *á-x'* and *á-ji* respectively. Similar surface forms exist for *ká* “surface” and *yá* “face”, and possibly others.

“scissors”, lit. “that which cuts (hair on) a person’s head”

Note that although the instrumental role is clear in (4b), (4d), and (4e), it is difficult to describe such a role for (4a) and (4c). For (4a) a mosquito is certainly a “thing which bites”, but not obviously a “thing which is used for biting”. This can be solved by glossing the instrumentive *-aa* as “thing which accomplishes V-ing”.

## 6 Patientive

Story describes the *-adi* suffix as patientive, thus the derived noun has a patient role in the event context it is derived from. Considering the data she presented below this term is appropriate. However the paucity of data presented is, I feel, insufficient to draw a firm conclusion.

- (5) a. ghalsháatadi  
gha-l-shaat-[at-ÿi]  
ATEL-(l, -D, -l)-hold-PAT  
“prisoner, captive”  
b. x'éetadi  
Ø-x'eet-[at-ÿi]  
(Ø, -D, -l)-uproot-PAT  
“uprooted plant”

The suffix *-adi* is phonologically identical (except for tone) with the construction *át-ÿi* “thing of (it)” (it-POSS), which is realized as *ádi*. I propose that this patientive suffix is derived from *ádi* and has become a derivational suffix by grammaticalization. It is used in other parts of the noun lexicon, most notably in clan names such as *Sik'naxh?ádi* “along the glacier people”, *Ghaanaxh?ádi* “people of Ghaanaxh”, and *Teeyneidi* “bark people” (*-neidi* < *naa* “clan” + *-adi*).

## 7 Fragmentive

The fragmentive suffix *-dasi* essentially means “pieces of something”. Story only gave two examples of it, and eyeball searches of the two noun dictionaries (Leer *et al.*, 2001; Naish *et al.*, 1976) have not uncovered any further examples. I am not even certain that Tlingit speakers use these two words in speech to any

extent, or even if they recognize them. Further work with native speakers to determine the prevalence of these two words and the possibility of other uses of this suffix is necessary before any adequate conclusions can be made.

- (6) a. dákw<sub>dasi</sub>  
 Ø-daakw-dasi  
 (Ø, -D, -I)-render-FRAG  
 “fertilizer”
- b. kawá'l<sub>dasi</sub>  
 ka-Ø-waal'-dasi  
 KTHM-(Ø, -D, -I)-break-FRAG  
 “broken pieces”

## 8 Discussion

Some of the data herein raise questions about what the difference is exactly between nouns and verbs in Tlingit. There is already substantial confusion about derivational processes in the verb for Na-Dené languages due to the incorporated noun prefixes and problems with morpheme ordering (Rice, 2000), so it is not surprising that noun derivation is unclear as well. Beck (2001) proposes that nouns should not, at least in Native American languages, be closely identified with single words. Instead he claims that the notion of “noun” should be extended to cover any conventionalized expression that meets semantic and syntactic nounhood criteria whether or not the expression is morphologically and syntactically complex. This has significant applications for Tlingit where phrases such as those in (7) are syntactically closed like nouns, but which have the structural appearance of finite clauses rather than single words.

- (7) a. khaa kagéi kawahayi  
 khaa kagéi ka-ya-haa-ÿi  
 person across.from.it KTHM-(Ø, -D, -I)-meet-ATTR  
 “(human) rights”, “that which is due one”, “that which is met across from one”
- b. woosh kát kawdliyeeki aa  
 woosh ká-t ka-ÿu-dl-yeech-ÿi a-?{ÿi, x'}  
 RECIP.OBJ surface-PERT KTHM-PF-(l, +D, -I)-fly.PL-ATTR it-?{POSS, LOC}  
 “airplane”, lit. “it flies itself”

In addition, there are a number of other small problems which are left outstanding in this analysis, and which should be investigated with the help of native speakers. One in particular is the appearance of the frequentive suffix *-ch* in some instrumentive derivations. This suffix is almost universal in derivations which indicate weather phenomena – e.g. example (4c) –, but it also appears in a number of other descriptions of event qualities such as different forms of bubbles, types of dripping, types of dust, etc. It may be possible that *-ch* is a semantic indicator with connotations of repeated action, but this raises the question of why the repetitive suffix *-k(w)* is not used instead.

Other problems requiring further research include determining whether *-I* is always present in deverbal noun derivations, what differences exist between attributive derivations and attributive clauses with a non-null anaphor complement – cf. example (3) with (7b) –, and further examination of the connotations of the instrumentive and patientive suffixes, among others.

In conclusion, although Story's analysis of deverbal noun derivation was presented with limited data, its results were largely successful except that she seems to have been too eager to make conclusions about the semantic meaning of the derivational forms. Also, her morphological analysis was hampered by the lack of work at the time on Athabaskan and Eyak verbs and nouns with which to compare. The reanalysis presented in this paper provides an up-to-date foundation with which to further explore noun derivation and other nominal phenomena in Tlingit.

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