

## Modality Marking in Tlingit

### Introduction

Tlingit is an indigenous language spoken in Southeast Alaska, the Yukon, and parts of northern BC. It's estimated that there are about 200 speakers which includes learners at all levels of fluency (Twitchell 2016). Being a branch of the Na-Dene Athabaskan language family, Tlingit shares its relatives rich morphological system. This paper aims to propose a semantic analysis of one particular morpheme, *g-*, that historically has been glossed as a mode marker (Leer 1991). To do so, a review of the environments it can occur in, its interaction with neighboring morphemes, and a proposal for its modal force and flavor will be presented.

### Modality

The morpheme *g-* appears most apparently in future and hortative verb modes. Example 1b-1c contrast those two modes with an imperfective verb in example 1a.

#### Example 1.<sup>1</sup>

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|---|---|
| a. Imperfective<br>xasa.ée<br>∅-x̄a-sa-√.ée<br>∅-x̄ s- √.i- Hμ<br>3O-1S-CL-√cook-VAR<br>“I cook it; I am cooking it”                              | b. Future<br>kukasa.ée<br>k- u- k- a-sa-√.ée<br>∅-g- u- g- x̄-s-√.i- Hμ<br>3O-g.CJ-IRR-g.MD-1S- CL-√cook-VAR<br>“I will cook it.”<br>(Adapted from Twitchel 2016) |
| c. Hortative<br>kasa.ee<br>∅-k- a- sa-√.ee<br>∅-g- x̄a-sa-√.i- Hμ<br>3O-g.MD-1S -CL-√cook-VAR<br>“Let me cook it.”<br>(Adapted from Edwards 2009) |   |

Its presence is obligatory in example 1b and 1c. The modal marker also appears in potential verb modes not shown here. As is the case in most languages, direct translation can be impossible, as could be argued with example 1c where a better translation might be something like “*let it be the case that I cook it.*”

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<sup>1</sup> Glossing notes: √= root, 3O= 3rd person object, 3S= 3rd person subject, CL= classifier, CONJ= conjugation, DET=determine, Hμ= stem variation marker, IRR= irrealis, MD= modal, PFV= perfective, PST=past tense, REL=relative clause, REP= repetitive, THEM=thematic prefix, VAR=variation (adapted from Crippen 2013 glossing conventions and Twitchell 2016).

## The Issue

While huge headway in semantic understanding of Tlingit modality has been contributed by Cable 2014 among his other works, the interface between semantics and morphology still remains largely unanalyzed. Leer 1991 proposes the possibility of the *g*-morpheme having both epistemic and deontic force, but again there is a lack of clear morpho-semantic analysis to support either argument as of yet. This makes an analysis of an aspectual class that has this morpheme and other morphemes as part of its composition, as example 1b. does, especially challenging. By proposing a semantic contribution made by this morpheme a clearer understanding of the system as a whole is gained.

## Conclusion

The overall goal is to both contribute growing theoretical knowledge about Tlingit verbal morphology by arguing for a compositional semantic system while also hoping the analysis will make Tlingit verb creation more accessible to second language learners.

## References

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