

Imperfective (present tense)

In meaning, the Tlingit imperfective is roughly equivalent to the English present tense. The imperfective can refer to both an ongoing, continuous situation as in “s/he is doing it” and a general, valid situation as in “s/he does it”. For example, *al'eix* can mean both “s/he is dancing” (presently), as well as “s/he dances” (generally). Another example is *yat'aayi héen adaná* which can give both of the following readings: “s/he is drinking coffee” (presently) and “s/he drinks coffee” (generally).

Certain classes of verbs do not have a basic imperfective form. Specifically, motion and event verbs lack this form. This is indicated by “[does not occur]” in the imperfective field for these verbs. Many of the verbs falling in the event category in Tlingit describe instantaneous events, where the resulting situation is often more relevant than the actual process of the occurrence. Therefore, in Tlingit (and often in English as well), these events are described in the past tense rather than the present tense. Here are a few examples: *xwaa.oo* “I bought it” (rather than “I am buying it”); *xwaasháat* “I caught it” (instead of “I am catching it”); and *xwaat'ei* “I found it” (as opposed to “I am finding it”). For event and motion verbs, speakers use the progressive imperfective to convey a situation in progress and the repetitive imperfective to convey a regularly occurring situation. Please see these respective sections for further detail [Forthcoming].

The imperfective form can be either affirmative (positive) or negative. The affirmative imperfective form requires no prefixes or suffixes beyond the basic elements of the verb itself. All act verbs require the –I form of the classifier in the affirmative imperfective form, while state verbs require the +I form of the classifier. Please see the section titled “verb types” for a description of act and state verbs [forthcoming]. Remember that +I forms of the classifier are those which contain the vowel *i* (with the exception of *ya-* which is considered a +I form). The +I form category of classifiers includes *si-*, *dzi-*, *shi-*, *ji-*, *li-*, *dli-*, *ya-*, and *di*. The –I forms do not contain the vowel *i* and include *sa-*, *s-*, *sha-*, *sh-*, *la-*, *l-*, *ø-*, and *da-*. The verb stem in the imperfective is entirely unpredictable with respect to vowel tone and length. Let's look at a few examples, beginning with act verbs. The examples below are given with hyphens between their component parts for clarity.

<i>da-shóoch</i>	“s/he bathes; s/he's bathing” (act verb)
<i>at sa-.ée</i>	“s/he cooks; s/he's cooking” (act verb)
<i>a-s-t'eix</i>	“s/he trolls; s/he's trolling” (act verb)
<i>ø-gáax</i>	“s/he cries; s/he's crying” (act verb)

Each of these examples contains a classifier of the –I form (*da-*, *sa-*, *s-*, and *ø-* respectively), and a verb stem. Note that *axast'eix* additionally

has a prefix *a-* which is required by that particular verb. This is called a “thematic” prefix (please see the section titled “thematic prefixes” for more information). No additional morphology (prefixes and suffixes) is required for the basic imperfective form. Below are given a few state verbs in order to compare +I classifier forms with the above –I classifier forms in the act verbs.

<i>si-áax’w</i>	“it’s sour, bitter, spicy” (state verb)
<i>ku-dzi-tee</i>	“it exists; he/she/it is alive” (state verb)
<i>li-dzée</i>	“it’s difficult” (state verb)
<i>ya-sátk</i>	“he/she/it is fast” (state verb)

These state verbs are all given in the third person form, so there is no subject prefix (since the third person subject prefix is unmarked). Each verb above consists of a classifier of the +I form (*si-*, *dzi-*, *li-*, and *ya-* respectively) and a verb stem. Note that *ku-dzitee* additionally has the thematic prefix *ku-* which is required by that verb. The +I form of the classifier in the state verbs and the –I form of the classifier in the act verbs in the affirmative imperfective form is the main distinguishing characteristic between these two classes of verbs.

Now let’s look at the negative imperfective. The negative imperfective translates as both “s/he isn’t doing it” (presently) and “s/he doesn’t do it” (generally). All verbs, regardless of type (act or state) take the –I form of the classifier in the negative imperfective. As with the affirmative imperfective, the verb stems are unpredictable with respect to vowel tone and length in the negative imperfective. The negative imperfective requires both the negative particle *tlél/tléil* and the irrealis prefix *u-*. Irrealis means “not real” and the irrealis prefix *u-* occurs with many of the negative tenses in Tlingit as well as the future tense. Note that the irrealis prefix only occurs with the first person singular (“I”) and third person (“he/she/it”, “they”) subjects. First person plural (“we”) and second person (“you”, “you (plural)”) subjects do not coincide with the irrealis prefix *u-*. The irrealis prefix occurs after any thematic prefixes (*a-*, *ka-*, *tu-*, *ji-*, etc.) and before the subject prefix. The *u-* contracts with certain neighboring prefixes as will be seen below.

In the following two examples, we have the irrealis prefix *u-* followed by the first person subject prefix *x-*, a –I classifier (*da-*, *sa-*) and finally the stem. Note that the subject prefix *xa-* becomes *x-*. This is because Tlingit has a rule against 3 syllables in a row ending in vowels. *u-xa-da-shooch* breaks this rule so the middle syllable *xa-* is reduced to *x-*. Look for other examples of *xa-* reduced to *x-*. Is it because of the 3 syllable rule? Please see the appendix of *Say it in Tlingit* (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 2002) for more information on such contractions.

<i>tlél uxdashooch</i>	<i>(u- + xa- + da- + -shooch)</i>	“I don’t bathe; I’m not bathing”
<i>tlél uxsa.ee</i>	<i>(u- + xa- + sa- + -.ee)</i>	“I don’t cook it; I’m not cooking it”

The next example illustrates the contraction of the irrealis prefix *u-* with the preceding thematic prefix *a-*, resulting in *oo-*.

<i>tlél ooxast’eix</i>	<i>(a- + u- + xa- + s- + -t’eix)</i>	“I don’t troll; I’m not trolling”
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This contraction also takes place when a third person object prefix *a-* is next to the irrealis prefix *u-* as can be seen by comparing the next two examples. In the first, an affirmative imperfective form, there is a third person object prefix *a-* (which refers to “him/her/it”) followed by the (-I) classifier *l-* and the verb stem *-tséek*. In the second, a negative imperfective form, we see the contraction of the third person object prefix *a-* and the irrealis prefix *u-*, resulting in *oo-*, followed by the classifier and stem.

<i>altséek</i>	<i>(a- + l- + -tséek)</i>	“s/he is barbecuing it; s/he barbecues it”
<i>tlél ooltseek</i>	<i>(a- + u- + l- + -tseek)</i>	“s/he isn’t barbecuing it; s/he doesn’t barbecue it”

This irrealis prefix *u-* contracts with each of the thematic prefixes. Thematic prefixes are a basic element of many Tlingit verbs and include these familiar prefixes: *ka-*, *ya-*, *ku-*, *tu-*, *ji-*, *x’a-*. The most common contractions of thematic prefixes and the irrealis prefix *u-* are illustrated below.

<i>ka- + u- = koo-</i>	
<i>akahées’</i>	“s/he is borrowing it; s/he borrows it”
<i>tlél akoohées’</i>	“s/he isn’t borrowing it; s/he doesn’t borrow it”

<i>ya- + u- = yoo</i>	
<i>a daa yas.éix</i>	“s/he is examining it; s/he examines it”
<i>tlél a daa yoos.éix</i>	“s/he isn’t examining it; s/he doesn’t examine it”

<i>ku- + u- = koo-</i>	
<i>kudzitee</i>	“it exists; he/she/it is alive”
<i>tlél koostí</i>	“it doesn’t exist; he/she/it isn’t alive”

<i>tu- + u- = too-</i>	
<i>tuli.aan</i>	“s/he is kind”
<i>tlél tool.aan</i>	“s/he isn’t kind”

ji- + *u-* = *jee-*
ajikéi “s/he pays him/her; s/he is paying him/her”
tlél ajeeḵéi “s/he doesn’t pay him/her; s/he isn’t paying him/her”

x’a- + *u-* = *x’ei-*
x’alitseen “it’s expensive”
tlél x’eiltseen “it’s not expensive”

The next two examples illustrate the contraction of the first person subject prefix *x̄a-* and the irrealis prefix *u-* when the classifier is *∅-*. This combination results in *x̄wa-*.

tlél x̄waḡaaḡ (*u-* + *x̄a-* + *∅-* + *-ḡaaḡ*) “I don’t cry; I’m not crying”
tlél x̄wax̄á (*u-* + *x̄a-* + *∅-* + *-x̄á*) “I don’t eat it; I’m not eating it”

The following three state verbs illustrate the fact that while these verbs take the +I form of the classifier in the affirmative imperfective, they take the -I form in the negative imperfective.

tlél us.áax’w (*u-* + *s-* + *-.áax’w*) “it’s not sour, bitter, spicy”
tlél uldzée (*u-* + *l-* + *-dzée*) “it’s not difficult”
tlél usátk (*u-* + *∅-* + *-sátk*) “he/she/it isn’t fast”

The following three sets of examples show that first person plural (“we”) and second person (“you”, “you (plural)”) subjects do not occur with the irrealis prefix *u-*. So how can we tell if “we” and “you” imperfective verb forms are positive or negative? For first person plural and second person subjects, the main feature that distinguishes the negative from the affirmative imperfective form is the negative particle *tlél/tléil*. State verbs have the additional clue of using the -I form of the classifier in the negative imperfective, as shown by the final example below.

eeḡá “you eat it; you are eating it” (act verb)
tlél eeḡá “you don’t eat it; you aren’t eating it”

yidaná “you (plural) drink it; you (pl) are drinking it” (act verb)
tlél yidaná “you (plural) don’t drink it; you (pl) aren’t drinking it”

tudaxít’kw “we sweep; we are sweeping” (act verb)
tlél tudaxít’kw “we don’t sweep; we aren’t sweeping”

yéi sh tutudinook “we feel that way” (state verb)
tlél yéi sh tutudanook “we don’t feel that way”