

Progressive Imperfective

The progressive imperfective form describes a present and continuous situation, translating as “s/he is (in the process of) doing it” or “it’s in progress”. An example progressive imperfective form is *yaa nagút* “s/he is walking along”. As compared to the basic imperfective form, which usually states a general truth about a situation, the progressive tends to emphasize that the situation is currently in progress. It can also mean “s/he is trying to do it”, “s/he is beginning to do it”, or “s/he is still doing it”, depending on the verb. We will begin by looking at the structure of the progressive imperfective form and will then look at the variety of meanings this form can convey.

The progressive imperfective has four distinctive features. The first is a preverb (a required word which precedes the verb). The choice of preverb depends on the conjugation prefix (*∅-*, *na-*, *ga-*, or *ga-*) used by the verb. The preverb options are *yaa*, *kei*, and *yei*. Verbs which use the *∅-* and *na-* conjugation prefixes use the preverb *yaa* in the progressive; *ga-* conjugation verbs use the preverb *kei*; and *ga-* conjugation verbs use the preverb *yei*. There are a few cases where *ga-* conjugation verbs use the *yaa* preverb, but these generalizations hold true most of the time. The table below summarizes the first feature of the progressive imperfective by giving examples of one verb from each of the conjugation prefix (CP) groups. Each verb is given in the imperative and progressive imperfective forms. The imperative form serves to show the conjugation prefix of the verb. Note which preverb each verb uses in the progressive imperfective.

CP	Preverb	Imperative	English	Progr. Imperf	English
<i>∅-</i>	<i>yaa</i>	<i>Shalahík!</i>	Fill it!	<i>yaa ashanalhík</i>	s/he’s filling it
<i>na-</i>	<i>yaa</i>	<i>Aadé nakoox!</i>	Drive there!	<i>aadé yaa nakúx</i>	s/he’s driving there
<i>ga-</i>	<i>kei</i>	<i>Galk’éi!</i>	Improve it!	<i>kei analk’éin</i>	s/he’s improving it
<i>ga-</i>	<i>yei</i>	<i>Káx gidatí!</i>	Put it on!	<i>káx yei ndatéen</i>	s/he’s putting it on

The second feature of the progressive imperfective is the presence of the *na-* conjugation prefix (regardless of the verb’s regular conjugation prefix). Whether a verb belongs to the *∅-*, *na-*, *ga-*, or *ga-* conjugation category, *na-* will always be present in the progressive imperfective form. The *na-* prefix occurs after any thematic prefixes and before the subject prefix. Note in the table above, the *na-* present in each of the forms in the progressive imperfective column, and where it occurs in relation to other prefixes. Due to regular contractions, the *na-* will sometimes drop its vowel, surfacing as *n-*, as in the final example in the table above.

The third feature of the progressive imperfective is the classifier, which is always -I. The -I classifiers are: *sa-*, *s-*, *sha-*, *sh-*, *la-*, *l-*, *ø-*, and *da-*. Sometimes the classifiers with vowels drop their vowels as a result of a contraction with a neighboring prefix. In the progressive imperfective, the classifier only drops its vowel under these conditions: 1) if the verb has the 3rd person object prefix *a-* “him/her/it” OR the 4th person subject prefix *du-* “someone”; AND 2) if the classifier is one of the following: *sa-*, *sha-* or *la-*. Two examples from the above table, both of which have the third person object prefix *a-* “him/her/it” and the classifier *la-*, will help to clarify. The examples from the table above are given here with hyphens between their component parts. The vowel which drops out is given with a line through it.

yaa a-sha-na-la-hík → *yaa aashanalhík* “s/he’s filling it”
kei a-na-la-k’éin → *kei aanalk’éin* “s/he’s improving it”

We know the underlying form of the classifier in these verbs is *la-* by comparing them to the same verbs with a first person subject *xa-* “I”. In the case of a first person subject, the subject prefix *xa-* drops a vowel in this context, while the classifier *la-* retains its vowel. Compare the following examples with the ones just given above.

yaa sha-na-xa-la-hík → *yaa shanaxlahík* “I am filling it”
kei na-xa-la-k’éin → *kei naxlak’éin* “I am improving it”

The myriad of contractions that take place in Tlingit could constitute a dissertation of their own. Please see the prefix combination chart for the prefix string *na-* for a complete list of all contractions involving the prefix *na-*, and therefore relating to the progressive imperfective form.

The fourth and final feature of the progressive imperfective applies to the verb stem. Verbs ending in a consonant will have short vowels with high tone in the progressive imperfective. Short vowels with high tone in Tlingit are: *á*, *é*, *í*, and *ú*. Below are a few examples of verbs ending in a consonant, given in the imperfective first, followed by the progressive imperfective. Note that these verbs have short vowels with high tone in the progressive imperfective.

al’eix “s/he is dancing; s/he dances”
yaa anal’éx “s/he is dancing along”

ast’eix “s/he is trolling; s/he trolls”
yaa anast’éx “s/he is trolling along”

si.áat’ “it’s cold”
yaa nas.át’ “it’s getting cold”

The exception to the rule is verbs with invariable stems. Invariable stems never change, even in the progressive imperfective, and therefore invariable stems with long vowels in the imperfective will have long vowels in the progressive imperfective. The majority of verbs with invariable stems in Tlingit belong to the *ga-* conjugation category (as evidenced in the progressive imperfective by the preverb *kei*). Following are a few examples of verbs with invariable stems, again given in both the imperfective and progressive imperfective for comparison.

<i>si.áax'w</i>	“it’s sour”
<i>kei nas.áax'w</i>	“it’s getting sour”
<i>kuligóos'</i>	“it’s cloudy”
<i>kei kunalgóos'</i>	“it’s getting cloudy”
<i>yanéekw</i>	“s/he is sick”
<i>kei nanéekw</i>	“s/he is getting sick”

Verbs ending in a vowel (called open roots) acquire what is called the *n-stem* (Leer, 2001) in the progressive imperfective. The *n-stem* is the addition of *-n* to the end of the verb. The addition of *-n* to the end of the verb results in a long vowel with a high tone in the stem. For example, let’s consider two of the verbs given in the table above. In the imperative, we have *Galk'éi!* “Improve it!” and *Káx gidatí!* “Put it on!” Both of these verbs end in a vowel. In the progressive imperfective form, *-n* is added to the stems of these verbs, producing *kei analk'éin* and *káx yei ndatéen*, respectively. Note that while the stem in *káx gidatí* has a short vowel in the imperative (*-tí*), the vowel becomes long (*-téen*) in the progressive once the *-n* is added to the stem. The verb with the stem *-k'éi* remains long when the *-n* is added to the stem, producing *-k'éin*. One final point requires discussion regarding the *n-stem*. Some vowels change their quality entirely in the *n-stem*. Specifically, stems ending in *-aa* or *-oo* become *-éin* in the progressive imperfective. Here are a few examples, given in the perfective first, followed by the progressive imperfective.

<i>awsikóo</i>	“s/he knows him/her/it”
<i>yaa anaskwéin</i>	“s/he is beginning to know him/her, learn it”
<i>át akawsix'oo</i>	“s/he nailed it on it”
<i>aadé yaa akanasx'wéin</i>	“s/he is nailing it on it”
<i>du éet kuwaháa</i>	“it’s his/her turn”
<i>du eedé yaa kunahéin</i>	“his/her turn is coming up”
<i>yan akawligáa</i>	“s/he put up food”
<i>yánde yaa kanalgéin</i>	“s/he is putting up food”

Elsewhere within this introduction, the variable postposition *-t~/-ø~* has been described in detail. The relevance of this to the present topic is that this postposition will always be *-dé(i)* in the progressive imperfective form. The examples given just above illustrate this point. Note that in each of the final three pairs, a transformation takes place in the postpositional phrase from the perfective to the progressive imperfective: *át* becomes *aadé*; *du éet* becomes *du eedé*; and *yan* becomes *yánde*.

To summarize our discussion of the structural aspects of the progressive imperfective, another example verb from each conjugation prefix group is given below. The verbs are given first in the perfective form and then in the progressive, for comparison. Note the four features we have discussed in the progressive imperfective forms: 1) the preverb *yaa*, *kei*, or *yei*; 2) the presence of *n(a)-* in all verbs, regardless of regular conjugation category; 3) the *-I* classifiers *ø-* and *di-*; and 4) the *n-stem* on the verb which ends in a vowel.

CP:	Perfective:	Progressive imperfective:
<i>ø-</i>	<i>át has uwa.át</i> “they walked there”	<i>aadé yaa has na.át</i> “they are walking along there”
<i>na-</i>	<i>aagáa koo^uwashee</i> “s/he searched for it”	<i>aagáa yaa kunashéen</i> “s/he is going along searching for it”
<i>ga-</i>	<i>wudihaan</i> “s/he stood up”	<i>kei ndahán</i> “s/he is (in the process of) standing up”
<i>ga-</i>	<i>awdigaan</i> “it’s sunny”	<i>yei andagán</i> “it’s getting sunny”

To better understand the possible range of meanings that the progressive imperfective can convey, some discussion of verb types is necessary. Remember that there are four main verb types in Tlingit: act, state, event, and motion. Each verb type and its relationship to the progressive imperfective will be discussed in turn.

One of the defining characteristics of act verbs is that they have basic imperfective forms, which provide the present tense meaning. A few examples are: *ax’awóos* “s/he is asking him/her; s/he asks him/her”; *dashóoch* “s/he is bathing; s/he bathes”; *ahées* “s/he is borrowing it; s/he borrows it”; and *at sa.ée* “s/he is cooking; s/he cooks”. Because the present tense meaning is supplied by the basic imperfective form, many act verbs, including the ones just given, do not have progressive

imperfective forms. Remember that the progressive imperfective emphasizes that the situation described by the verb is “in progress”. Pragmatically speaking, for some verbs, this emphasis is not useful or necessary, since the basic imperfective form adequately conveys the situation. In these cases, the progressive imperfective form sounds awkward and unacceptable to fluent Tlingit speakers. An equivalent in English might be to say “she’s in the process of asking him”, rather than simply saying “she’s asking him” or “he’s in the process of bathing”, rather than “he’s bathing”. Although using English to guess at which Tlingit act verbs will have progressive imperfective forms is a bad idea because all languages are categorized differently.

When both the imperfective and progressive imperfective forms are acceptable for a given act verb, there sometimes seems to be overlap in meaning between the two. Some examples follow, with the imperfective given first and the progressive imperfective second: *aswáat/kei anaswát* “s/he is raising him/her/it”; *asxook/yaa anasxúk* “s/he is drying it”; and *aksakei/yei akanaskéin* “s/he is untangling it”. These verbs describe activities which require a significant amount of time, which may be the logic behind the use of the progressive imperfective as an equivalent to the basic imperfective.

A few other act verbs have progressive imperfective forms. These tend to give the meaning “(verbing) along” or “going along (verbing)”, and usually pertain to verbs which can be carried out while moving from one place to the next. Examples are given in the basic imperfective first, followed by the progressive imperfective: *al’èix* “s/he is dancing; s/he dances”/ *yaa anal’èix* “s/he is dancing along”; *ast’èix* “s/he is trolling; s/he trolls”/ *yaa anast’èix* “s/he is trolling along”; *aagáa kushée* “s/he is searching for it; s/he searches for it”/ *aagáa yaa kunashéen* “s/he is going along searching for it”.

At least two act verb in the progressive imperfective are preferred with the adverb *yeisú* and give the meaning “still (verbing)”. These are: *yoo has x’ali.átk* “they are conversing” as compared to the progressive imperfective: *(yeisú) yaa has x’anal.át* “they are still conversing”; and *sh kalneek* “s/he is telling a story” as compared to: *(yeisú) aadé yaa sh kanalník* “s/he is still getting to the point”.

And finally, for another act verb, the progressive form gives the meaning “beginning to (verb)”: *gáax* “s/he is crying” and *kei nagáx* “s/he is beginning to cry”.

State verbs in Tlingit also have basic imperfective forms, and most, but not all, describe a particular state of being. Given that general meaning,

these verbs in the progressive imperfective form produce the meaning “getting to be (that way)”. Here are some examples:

<u>Imperfective</u>		<u>Progressive Imperfective</u>	
<i>kayagéi</i>	“it’s big”	<i>yaa kanagéin</i>	“it’s getting big”
<i>si.áax’w</i>	“it’s sour”	<i>kei nas.áax’w</i>	“it’s getting sour”
<i>kuligóos’</i>	“it’s cloudy”	<i>kei kunalgóos’</i>	“it’s getting cloudy”
<i>si.áat’</i>	“it’s cold”	<i>yaa nas.át’</i>	“it’s getting cold”
<i>lidzée</i>	“it’s difficult”	<i>kei naldzéen</i>	“it’s getting difficult”
<i>yak’ei</i>	“it’s good”	<i>kei nak’ëin</i>	“it’s getting better”
<i>lináalx</i>	“s/he’s rich”	<i>kei nalnáalx</i>	“s/he’s getting rich”
<i>yanéekw</i>	“s/he’s sick”	<i>kei nanéekw</i>	“s/he’s getting sick”

Not all state verbs have progressive imperfective forms. A few examples of state verbs without progressive imperfective forms are: *tuli.aan* “s/he is kind”; *yéi kwdzigéi* “they’re small”; and *yéi aya.óo* “s/he is wearing it”.

The progressive imperfective is used most widely with verbs that describe motion. Since motion verbs as a category do not have basic imperfective forms, most use the progressive imperfective form to describe a motion in progress. For example: *yaa nagút* “s/he is walking along” and *yánde yaa nahú* “s/he is wading ashore”. Examples from this category are endless as most motion verbs have a progressive imperfective form. A select few are given here, first in the perfective form and then in the progressive imperfective form: *át kuwatín* “s/he traveled there” / *aadé yaa kunatín* “s/he’s traveling there”; *yan akawligáa* “s/he put up food” / *yánde yaa akanalgéin* “s/he is putting up food”; and *kut wujixeex* “s/he ran away” / *kut kei nashíx* “s/he is running away”.

Many event verbs in Tlingit describe an event that takes place instantaneously. For the most part, it is not useful or even possible to discuss the process of the event. In these cases, no progressive imperfective form exists. Here are a few examples, given in the perfective: *aawa.oo* “s/he bought it”; *aawasháat* “s/he caught it”; and *aawat’ei* “s/he found it”. There are however, some event verbs which don’t describe instantaneous events, and for which it may be useful to discuss the process of the occurrence. In this case, the progressive imperfective form is used. A few examples are: *iwlich’ëx’w* “you’re dirty” / *yaa inalch’ëx’w* “you’re getting dirty”; *ashawlihík* “s/he filled it” / *yaa ashanalhík* “s/he’s filling it”; and *wudishán* “s/he’s old” / *yaa ndashán* “s/he’s getting old”. A few other event verbs in the progressive imperfective give the meaning “starting to (verb)”. Two examples are: *wuduwanúk* “it blew; it’s blowing (of wind)” / *yaa ndunúk* “it’s starting to blow”; and *wudli.úk* “it’s boiling; it boiled” / *yaa nal.úk* “it’s starting to boil”.

The negative progressive imperfective is much less common than the affirmative. It is a relatively cumbersome thing to say, with little practicality – in few contexts does one need to say “s/he is not in the process of doing it” (as opposed to the simple negative imperfective “s/he’s not doing it”). In attempting to collect the negative progressive form for verbs in this resource at the outset of my research, it quickly became evident that this is not a form that speakers use with any frequency. While there may be isolated incidents in which one would require the negative progressive imperfective form, the overall utility of this form seems very low, and thus was not collected for this project.