

About the prefix combination charts

Tlingit verbs are made up of a root plus prefixes. When the various prefixes combine, they often contract, changing their original form. Taking an example from English, “cannot” often contracts to “can’t”. The difference is that the contractions that take place in Tlingit are not optional. The prefix combination charts linked from this page will serve to show the contractions of almost all possible combinations of prefixes. The prefix combinations are the predictable aspect of Tlingit verbs. These charts will answer questions like, “What do you get when you combine *ka-*, *wu-*, *u-*, *xa-*, and *sha-*?” Answer: *kaxwsha-* as in *tlél kaxwshaxeet* “I didn’t write it”.

Some verbal prefixes in Tlingit convey information such as verb tense and subject, while others are an inherent property of the verb. The inventory of verbal prefixes in Tlingit includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- 1) Classifiers (\emptyset -, *da-*, *ya-*, *di-*, *sa-*, *s-*, *si-*, *dzi-*, *sha-*, *sh-*, *shi-*, *ji-*, *la-* *l-* *li-*, and *dli-*)
- 2) Subject prefixes (*xa-*, *ee-*, \emptyset -, *too-*, *yi-*, and *du-*)
- 3) Conjugation prefixes (*na-*, *ga-*, *Ga-*, and \emptyset -)
- 4) Thematic prefixes (*ka-*, *tu-*, *ji-*, *ya-*, *ku-*, *x’a-*, etc.)
- 5) Perfective (past tense) prefix (*wu-*)
- 6) Irrealis (negative) prefix (*u-*)

All Tlingit verbs, in addition to a root, minimally have a classifier and subject prefix. Accordingly, the prefix combination charts are organized by subject prefix on the y-axis and classifier on the x-axis, as shown below. Because there are too many classifiers to fit across one page, the tables are given in sets of two, with the first 8 classifiers given across the top of the first table and the second 8 given in the second table. Note also in the x-axis are the labels Irr.-1.sg., Irr.-3., and Irr.-4. These rows give the combination of the 1st, 3rd, and 4th person subject prefixes along with the irrealis (negative) prefix *u-*. This irrealis prefix does not occur with the other subject prefixes, so it is only necessary to show the negative prefix with the 1st, 3rd, and 4th person subjects. Every prefix combination chart has at a minimum these combinations:

| Classifier: | \emptyset | da- | ya- | di- | sa- | s- | si- | dzi- |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 1.sg. | <i>x</i> a- | | | | | | | |
| 2.sg. | <i>ee-</i> | | | | | | | |
| 3. | \emptyset - | | | | | | | |
| 3-3. | <i>a-</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1.pl. | <i>too-</i> | | | | | | | |
| 2.pl. | <i>yi-</i> | | | | | | | |
| 4. | <i>du-</i> | | | | | | | |
| Irr.-1.sg. | <i>u-x</i> a- | | | | | | | |
| Irr.-3. | <i>u-</i> \emptyset - | | | | | | | |
| Irr.-4. | <i>u-du-</i> | | | | | | | |

| Classifier: | sha- | sh- | shi- | ji- | la- | l- | li- | dli- |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 1.sg. | <i>x</i> a- | | | | | | | |
| 2.sg. | <i>ee-</i> | | | | | | | |
| 3. | \emptyset - | | | | | | | |

| | |
|------------|----------------|
| 3-3. | a- |
| 1.pl. | too- |
| 2.pl. | yi- |
| 4. | du- |
| Irr.-1.sg. | u- <u>x</u> a- |
| Irr.-3. | u-Ø- |
| Irr.-4. | u-du- |

Some verbs, in addition to a classifier and subject prefix, have a thematic prefix such as *ka-*, illustrated by the verb *kaxashxeet* “I am writing”. This verb consists of the thematic prefix *ka-*, subject prefix *xa-*, classifier *sh-*, and the verb root *-xeet*. Sometimes the thematic prefixes contract with the subject prefix and classifier. In order to show the results of all of these possible combinations, each chart gives tables showing the combination of the above subject and classifier prefixes with each of three thematic prefixes: *ka-*, *ji-*, and *tu-*. The different vowels in these thematic prefixes result in different contractions, which is why these three prefixes were chosen as representative samples. Each of these represents all other thematic prefixes containing the same vowel. If you are wondering about a verb that contains a thematic prefix different from one of these, refer to the table whose thematic prefix has the same vowel as the one in question. For example, if you want to determine the prefix combinations for the verb *kuwak’ei* “the weather is good”, which has the thematic prefix *ku-*, you would refer to the table containing the thematic prefix *tu-*, (since both contain the vowel *u*) and replace the *t* with a *k* throughout. Likewise, if you want to look up prefix combinations for the verb *yaawat’aa* “it’s hot”, which contains the thematic prefix *ya-*, you should refer to the tables containing the thematic prefix *ka-*, since *ka-* has the same vowel as *ya-*.

Prefix string 0-

What has been described so far is the most basic prefix combination chart: 0. The chart titled “Prefix string 0-” lists all subject plus classifier plus thematic prefix combinations, without any additional prefixes. This chart is useful for determining the prefix combinations in the imperfective (present tense), since this verb tense requires no other prefixes.

From here, all other charts build on this foundation, and add prefixes related to different verb tenses/aspects.

Prefix string wu- (perfective)

The *wu-* prefix chart applies to perfective (past tense) forms only. This chart lists the combinations of the perfective prefix *wu-* plus all subject, classifier, and thematic prefix combinations. Note that the perfective prefix *wu-* and the irrealis (negative) prefix *u-* do not co-occur, so in the negative perfective, the irrealis marker is dropped. For this reason, there are no rows showing combinations with the irrealis marker in the perfective chart.

Prefix string ga-u-Ga (future)

The future prefix chart applies to future forms only. This chart lists the combinations of the future prefixes (*ga-u-Ga-*) along with all subject, classifier, and thematic prefix combinations. Note that future forms always use the –I form of the classifier, so the future chart only contains prefix combinations with –I classifiers.

Prefix string *na-*, Prefix string *ga-*, and Prefix string *Ga-*

The following group of charts pertain to the conjugation prefixes *na-*, *ga-*, and *Ga-*. Certain verb forms require the use of a conjugation prefix. The two verb forms included in this resource which require a conjugation prefix are the imperative (command) and perfective habitual (which translates as “s/he does it every time”). There are a total of four conjugation prefix options (*na-*, *ga-*, *Ga-*, and \emptyset - (no prefix)). Every Tlingit verb uses one of these four options. For example, in the imperative, *na-* conjugation verbs use the *na-* prefix (*Nagú!* “Go!”); *ga-* conjugation verbs use the *ga-* prefix (*Gagwáal!* “Beat it (drum)!”); *Ga-* conjugation verbs use the *Ga-* prefix (*Ga.éex!* “Invite him/her!”); and \emptyset - conjugation verbs use no conjugation prefix (*La.áx!* “Play it (musical instrument)!”).

The *na-*, *ga-*, and *Ga-* charts will be useful in determining the prefix combinations for verbs belonging in each of these categories for the imperative and perfective habitual verb forms. Note however that some verbs do not use the second person singular subject prefix in the imperative form, this described in detail under the “Imperative” grammar description linked from the home page. Note also that \emptyset - conjugation verbs use the irrealis (negative) prefix *u-* in the perfective habitual form, this also described in detail under the “Perfective Habitual” grammar description linked from the home page.

Note that the *Ga-* chart additionally applies to any \emptyset - conjugation verbs in the hortative, potential attributive, or potential decessive verb forms because these three forms always require the *Ga-* prefix in addition to the verb’s regular conjugation prefix.

Prefix string *na-Ga-*, Prefix string *ga-Ga-*, and Prefix string *Ga-Ga-*

As mentioned above, there are three verb forms included in this resource that require both the *Ga-* prefix in addition to the verb’s regular conjugation prefix (*na-*, *ga-*, *Ga-*, or \emptyset - (no prefix)). These are the hortative (“let him/her do it”), the potential attributive (“no way can s/he do it”), and the potential decessive (“s/he would have done it”) forms. These charts give the combination of the *Ga-* prefix plus the verb’s regular conjugation prefix (*na-*, *ga-* or *Ga-*) along with the subject, classifier, and thematic prefixes.