

Methodology

The research for this project was conducted through consultation with over 30 different native speakers of Tlingit over the course of eleven years (2005-2016). Regular meetings were established 2-3 times per week, for two hours per meeting. Meetings were audio recorded and are archived with the Alaska Native Language Archives. The research was generally conducted in consultation with 1-6 speakers at a time, depending on consultants' availability. A list of target verbs was prepared in advance of each session, including any information already known about the verbs (such as conjugation prefix or example sentences containing conjugated forms). For each of the verbs, a pre-set list of the following twelve modes were elicited from the consultants (note that (+/-) indicates that both the affirmative and negative are documented): imperative (do it!), prohibitive (don't do it!), imperfective (+/-) (is/isn't doing it), progressive imperfective (is going along doing it; is starting to do it), perfective (+/-) (did/didn't do it), future (+/-) (will/won't do it), perfective habitual (+/-) (would do it; does it every time / hasn't done it yet), hortative (let do it), potential attributive (can't do it), potential decessive (would have done it), conditional (if/when does it), and repetitive imperfective (does it regularly). At a minimum, each mode is documented with a 3rd person subject. For some verbs, both 1st and 3rd person subject forms are documented, because for some verbs it is necessary to know both in order to predict all other subject prefix combinations. For a few of the verb entries, all subject prefixes are included to serve as an example of a complete paradigm for the language learner.

For many of the modes, it was straightforward to elicit the target forms from fluent speakers. Others, however, required more contextual background in order to get at the desired form. Using the simple, every-day verb 'eat' as an example, it was easy to elicit modes like the perfective 'he ate it', the imperative 'Eat it!', and the future 'he will eat it'. Other modes, such as the perfective habitual and the repetitive imperfective were trickier. Because the perfective habitual has a couple of different potential time references ('he would do it (habitually, in the past)' or 'he does it every time X happens'), and because there are other modes in Tlingit that are similarly translated into English, this mode proved to be one of the most difficult to elicit. Obtaining the perfective habitual form often required setting up a scenario in which that particular form would be the most natural to use. For

example, “John’s cousin George lives in Seattle. George loves herring eggs, but can’t get them in Seattle. Every time George comes to visit John in Sitka, they eat herring eggs.” If one were to ask a speaker simply how to say “he eats it every time”, one would probably end up with the imperfective habitual form (rather than the perfective habitual form), which means something more like “he always eats it”. Similarly, the repetitive imperfective form was difficult to elicit. This form is used to depict an event or situation that happens regularly or repeatedly (but not necessarily every time X happens, as with the perfective habitual). The repetitive imperfective is even harder to tease out from the imperfective habitual, the two having very similar semantics, especially in their English translations. To elicit the repetitive imperfective form for “eat”, a scenario such as the following would be provided: “Mary saw me buying ten bricks of cheese at the grocery store. She said, ‘Whoa, who eats all the cheese at your house?’ and I told her, ‘My son eats cheese. He eats it on everything. We go through a lot of cheese.’ ” One would expect the repetitive imperfective form to surface given this scenario.

Some verbs in some modes were difficult to elicit because of their combined semantics. For example, it would require unusual circumstances to use the verb ‘lose’ in the imperative, as in ‘Lose it!’ For other verbs, target forms were culturally unacceptable to say. Respect for everyone is an extremely important value in Tlingit culture. For this reason, it was difficult to elicit many of the negative forms for such a verb. In such cases, the scenarios needed to be carefully constructed to get at the desired forms. If it was not possible to obtain a form, “[does not occur]” was entered in that field.

In addition to the list of conjugated forms in the twelve different modes listed above, each verb entry in the database has the following components: the English gloss of the verb; the theme as given in Story & Naish (1973) for cross-referencing; the theme developed in the present research (please see the Verb Theme link on the home page for a thorough description of the theme); variant pronunciations; for plural stems the singular counterpart is given and for singular stems the plural counterpart is given; notes to the reader wherever relevant or helpful; and many of the verb entries additionally have example sentences.