13. Potential (Excerpt from Eggleston, 2013)

Semantically, the potential mode in Tlingit has future tense reference, translating as 's/he might/could do it'. An example is *Gwál kwaakasiteen* 'I might see it' (Leer, 1991:387). Two sub-types of the potential mode were documented in *575+ Tlingit Verbs*: the potential attributive and the potential decessive. These will be the topic of discussion here.

13.1 Potential Attributive

The potential mode in Tlingit most often occurs in relative clause constructions (Leer, 1991:385). Using our example potential verb above, a very common construction is: *tlél aadé kwaakasiteeni yé (koostí)* 'there's no way I can see it' or 'I can't see it'. A word-for-word break down of this construction follows in (278):

(278) *tlél*   *aadé*   *kwaakasiteeni*   *yé*   *(koostí)*

      no   way   I might/could see it   place   (is/exists)

In this construction, the negative particle *tlél* refers to the main verb of the sentence *koostí*, which is in the negative form, and means 'doesn't exist'. The potential attributive form *kwaakasiteeni* is in a relative (dependent) clause. Although *koostí* is the main verb, it is almost never actually stated, but is understood, which is why it is in parentheses above.

The potential attributive mode in Tlingit is characterized by the following: 1) irrealis prefix *u-*; 2) the verb's regular conjugation prefix *(Ø-, na-, ga-, or ga-)*; 3) aspect prefix *ga-*; 4) the +I form of the classifier (*si-, dzi-, shi-, ji-, li-, dli-, ya-,* or *di-,* and; 5) the attributive suffix *–i/-u*. The choice of vowel follows the same rules as the prohibitive and possessive suffixes (see Chapter 12 of this dissertation and Dauenhauer et al (2010)). The verb stem in the potential is the same as in the hortative for a given verb.

Note that the realis (affirmative) potential and irrealis (negative) potential forms are identical, both requiring the irrealis prefix *–u* and having identical verb stem forms. (279a-b) are examples from Leer (1991:387). *Gwál* translates as 'maybe' and is not required by the verb, but is a particle that is often used by speakers along with the potential.

(279a) *Gwál ḵwaaḵasiteen*   'I might see it'   Realis Potential

(279b) *Gwál tléil ḵwaaḵasiteen*   'I might not see it'   Irrealis Potential

Because the potential mode requires the verb's regular conjugation prefix along with the aspect prefix *ga-*, and the irrealis prefix *u-,* a variety of contractions take place, making the prefix combination charts especially handy for this form. It will be helpful to discuss each of the four conjugation prefixes separately. Let's look at some examples, beginning with *Ø-* conjugation verbs.

13.1.1 *Ø* Conjugation Verbs

Below each example, a schematic representation of each verbal component is given for comparison with the contracted, spoken form. Let's walk through Example (280) together. The potential attributive form *ooxlitséegi* is made up of each of the parts given in parentheses below the example. These are: 1) object prefix *a-* 'it'; 2) irrealis prefix *u-*; 3) this verb's conjugation prefix, which is *Ø-*; 4) aspect prefix *ga-* which is required by the potential mode; 5) classifier *li-*; 6) verb stem *–tséek* 'barbecue' and; 7) attributive suffix *–i*, which makes this a dependent (as opposed to main) verb. A couple of contractions have taken place to produce the spoken form of the verb. First, the object prefix *a-* contracts with the irrealis prefix *u-*, producing *oo-*. Second, due to the '3 open syllable rule' in Tlingit, which drops the vowel of the middle of 3 open syllables in a row, the vowel drops out of the aspect prefix *ga-*. This leaves a *g-* next to the classifier *li-*, an unacceptable consonant cluster in Tlingit. The *g-* therefore becomes *x-*, thus producing *ooxli-*. Note that this change from *g-* to *x-* occurs everywhere where *g-* directly precedes any classifier beginning with a consonant. Examples (280-282) further illustrate what we've discussed so far.

(280)   *tlél aadé ooxlitséegi yé*   'no way can s/he barbecue it'

      (a- + u- + Ø- + ga- + li- + -tséek + -i)

(281)   *tlél aadé ooxsi.eeyi yé*   'no way can s/he cook it'

      (a- + u- + Ø- + ga- + si- + -.ee + -i)

(282) *tlél aadé ooxdinaayi yé*   'no way can s/he drink it'

      (a- + u- + Ø- + ga- + di- + -naa + -i)

Verbs with the *ya-* classifier undergo different contractions. Here, the aspect prefix *ga-* doesn't drop its vowel and the consonant *g* remains unchanged. Example (283) below illustrates the contraction of the aspect prefix *ga-* with the classifier *ya-*, which results in *gaa-*.

(283) *tlél aadé oogaa.aaxi yé*   'no way can s/he hear it'

      (a- + u- + Ø- + ga- + ya- + -.aax + -i)

In (284) below, the verb has the thematic prefix *sha-*. Following this, we see the contraction of the irrealis prefix *u-*, the aspect prefix *ga-*, and the classifier *ya-*, all together producing *gwaa-*. The same contraction takes place in (285), except here, there is the object prefix *a-* followed by the thematic prefix *ka-*, which drops its vowel since it's the middle of three open syllables in a row.

(284) *tlél aadé shagwaaheegi yé*   'no way can he/she/it get full'

      (sha- + u- + Ø- + ga- + ya- + -heek + -i)

(285) *tlél aadé akgwaachuxu yé*   'no way can s/he knead it'

      (a- + ka- + u- + Ø- + ga- + ya- + -chux + -i)

Example (286) below has no object prefix, and here, the irrealis prefix contracts with the thematic prefix *ka-,* producing *koo-*. Here again, the *ga-* aspect prefix has dropped its vowel and become *x-* because it's the middle of three open syllables and is followed by the classifier *dzi-*.

(286) *tlél aadé kooxdzinéiyi yé*   'no way can s/he knit'

      (ka- + u- + Ø- + ga- + dzi- + -néi + -i)

As seen by the above examples, the irrealis prefix *u-* may surface in a variety of possible locations in the prefix string, based on which other prefixes are present, and with which it contracts. For example, the irrealis prefix *u-* may contract with the following prefixes: 1) at the beginning of the word with the object prefix *a-*, producing *oo-*, as seen in examples (280-283) above; 2) with a thematic prefix such as *ka-*, producing *koo-* as seen in (286) or; 3) with the aspect prefix *ga-*, in which case it surfaces as rounding on the consonant, producing *–gw-* or *-xw-* depending on the following classifier. Examples (284) and (285) above illustrate this option. For some verbs, this results in alternate pronunciations of the potential attributive form. For example, revisiting (283) above, either of the following would be acceptable: *tlél aadé oogaa.aaxi yé* OR *tlél aadé agwaa.aaxi yé*. Most fluent speakers would accept either of these forms. In this resource, most of the time only one of the options is documented for each verb, with the understanding that either would be acceptable (as illustrated in the prefix combination charts in the appendices).

For a complete table of contractions involving Ø conjugation verbs in the potential mode, see the *ga-* prefix combination chart in Appendix G.

Next, we'll look at verbs that use the *na-*, *ga-*, or *ga-* conjugation prefixes. The addition of these conjugation prefixes to the mix makes for a variety of different resulting prefix combinations.

13.1.2 *Na* Conjugation Verbs

The following are examples of *na* conjugation verbs in the potential attributive form. Compare (287), (288) and (289) below for another example of the irrealis prefix contracting with alternate prefixes (contracting with the object prefix *a-* in (287) and (288), producing *oo-*, and with the aspect prefix *ga-* in (289), resulting in *xw-*).

(287)   *tlél aadé oongaas'óowu yé*   'no way can s/he chop it'

   (a- + u- + na- + ga- + ya- + -s'óow + -u)

(288) *tlél aadé oonaxlixaashi yé*   'no way can s/he cut it'

  (a- + u- + na- + ga- + li- + -xaash + -i)

(289) *tlél aadé anaxwdzit'eixi yé*   'no way can s/he troll'

  (a- + u- + na- + ga- + dzi- + -t'eix + -i)

For a complete table of contractions involving *na* conjugation verbs in the potential mode, see the *na-ga-* prefix combination chart in Appendix H.

13.1.3 *Ga* Conjugation Verbs

The following are example potential attributive forms for *ga* conjugation verbs. Where the classifier is *ya-* the prefix combination will be *gugaa-* (coming from *u-ga-ga-ya-*) as in (290) below. However, if the verb has an object prefix *a-*, or a thematic prefix (such as *ka-*), then the contraction changes. The vowel drops out of *ga-* because of the "3 open syllable" rule, and the *g-*, being next to *ga-* becomes *k-*. Thus, *a-u-ga-ga-ya-* becomes *akgwaa-*, as in (291) below.

(290) *tlél aadé at gugaasheeyi yé*   'no way can s/he sing'

  (u- + ga- + ga- + ya- + -shee + -i)

(291) *tlél aadé akgwaasheeyi yé*   'no way can s/he sing it'

  (a- + u- + ga- + ga- + ya- + -shee + -i)

For verbs with classifiers other than *ya-*, the prefix combination will render *gux-(clf)-*. This is a result of the aspect prefix *ga-* dropping its vowel and becoming *x-* next to a consonant-vowel classifier (such as *li-, si-, shi-,* etc.). For example, see (292) below. Example (293) shows that the contraction will be the same in the presence of a thematic prefix (*x'a-* in this case).

(292) *tlél aadé guxlidzéeyi yé*   'no way can it be difficult'

  (u- + ga- + ga- + li- + -dzee + -i)

(293) *tlél aadé x'aguxlitseeni yé*   'no way can it be expensive'

  (x'a- + u- + ga- + ga- + li- + -tseen + -i)

For a complete table of contractions involving *ga* conjugation verbs in the potential mode, see the *ga-ga-* prefix combination chart in Appendix I.

13.1.4 *Ga* Conjugation Verbs

When the conjugation prefix *ga-* is combined with the aspect prefix *ga-*, the first *ga-* gets a long vowel: *gaa-*. What happens to the second *ga-* depends on which classifier follows. If it's *ya-*, then the result is: *gaagaa-* (*ga- + ga- + ya-*). Add the irrealis prefix *u-* and you get *gaagwaa-*. Example (294) below illustrates this combination, with the additional object prefix *a-*.

(294) *tlél aadé agaagwaaxooxu yé*   'no way can s/he summon him'

  (a- + u- + ga- + ga- + ya- + -xoox + -u)

If there's a thematic prefix present (such as *ka-*), the irrealis prefix *u-* usually contracts with it, producing *koo-*. For example, in (295) below we see the string: *a-ka-u-ga-ga-ya-* contract to produce: *akoogaagaa*.

(295) *tlél aadé akoogaagaas'éil'i yé*   'no way can s/he tear it'

  (a- + ka- + u- + ga- + ga- + ya- + -s'éil' + -i)

If the prefix string includes a classifier other than *ya-*, the resulting combination is *gaaxw-(clf)-*. Here, the second *ga-* becomes *x-*, and the *x-* becomes rounded (*xw-*) because of the irrealis prefix *u-*. Examples (296) and (297) below illustrate this combination.

(296) *tlél aadé gaaxwdixéet'i yé*   'no way can s/he sweep'

  (u- + ga- + ga- + di- + -xéet' + -i)

(297) *tlél aadé agaax̱wdzigáax̱i yé*   'no way can s/he ask for it'

   (a- + u- + g̱a- + g̱a- + dzi- + -g̱áax̱+ -i)

Again, if there's a thematic prefix present, the tendency is for the irrealis prefix to contract with it. In (298) below, the string *a-ka-u-g̱a-ga-si-* becomes *akoog̱aax̱si-*.

(298) *tlél aadé akoog̱aax̱sikeiyi yé*   'no way can s/he untangle it'

   (a- + ka- + u- + g̱a- + ga- + si- + -kei + -i)

For a complete table of contractions involving *g̱a* conjugation verbs in the potential mode, see the *g̱a-g̱a-* prefix combination chart in Appendix J.

13.2 Potential Decessive

The potential decessive form translates as 's/he would have done it (but didn't)'. The potential decessive is usually used as the main verb in conjunction with a dependent clause. Here's an example: X̱wasateeni kát ḵwaaḵa.éex'in. 'If I had seen him, I would have invited him.' Here, the potential decessive form ḵwaaḵa.éex'in 'I would have invited him' is the main verb in the sentence, while x̱wasateeni 'if I had seen him' is in the dependent clause.

Structurally, the potential decessive is similar to the potential attributive with two differences: the –I form of the classifier is used and the decessive suffix *–in/-un* is used instead of the attributive suffix. Note that the decessive suffix takes the opposite tone of the verb stem. The potential decessive then, requires the following: 1) irrealis prefix *u-*; 2) the verb's conjugation prefix (*Ø-, na-, ga-,* or *g̱a-*); 3) the aspect prefix *g̱a-*; 4) the –I form of the classifier (*sa-, s-, sha-, sh-, la-, l-, Ø-,* or *da-*) and; 5) the decessive suffix *–in/-un*. The choice of vowel in the decessive suffix follows the same rules for the attributive suffix, prohibitive suffix, and the possessive suffix (see Chapter 12 of this dissertation and Dauenhauer et al (2010)). The verb stem in the potential decessive is the same as in the potential attributive.

As mentioned above, the shape of the verb stem is not predictable in the potential however, for a given verb, it will be the same in the potential attributive and potential decessive forms. Compare the potential attributive form in (299a) below with the potential decessive form in (299b).

(299a) *tlél aadé ooxsi.eeyi yé*   'no way can s/he cook it'
(299b) *ooxsa.eeyín*   's/he would have cooked it'

For the most part, the prefix combinations will be the same in the potential decessive as were discussed for the potential attributive. The main difference will be for verbs that use the classifier pair *ya-/Ø-*. Because the potential attributive form requires the +I classifier (*ya-*) while the potential decessive form requires the –I classifier (*Ø-*), the decessive forms won't have the long vowel on the aspect prefix *ga-* as seen in the attributive forms. For example, in (300a) the aspect prefix *ga-* combines with the +I form of the classifier *ya-*, producing *gaa-*. In (300b), the –I classifier *Ø-* is used, as required by the decessive form, and so the aspect prefix remains unchanged, *ga-*. As a side note, 'hear it' is a *Ø* conjugation verb.

(300a) *tlél aadé oogaa.aaxi yé*   'no way can s/he hear it'
        (a- + u- + Ø- + ga- + ya- + -.aax + -i)
(300b) *ooga.aaxín*   's/he would have heard it'
        (a- + u- + Ø- + ga- + Ø- + -.aax + -ín)

This next pair of examples contains a *na* conjugation verb, and illustrates the same point. The attributive form in (301a) has a long vowel on the aspect prefix *gaa-* due to the contraction with the classifier *ya-*, while the decessive form in (301b) has a short vowel *ga-* because the classifier is *Ø-*.

(301a) *tlél aadé oongaal'eixi yé*   'no way can s/he dance'
        (a- + u- + na- + ga- + ya- + -l'eix + -i)

(301b)*oongal'eix̱ín* 'she would have danced'

  (a- + u- + na- + g̱a- + Ø- + -l'eix̱ + -in)

Since all other relevant prefix combinations are discussed above for the potential attributive form, there will be no surprises in the example potential decessive forms given below. Examples will be given for each of the conjugation prefixes, beginning with *Ø-*.

13.2.1 *Ø* Conjugation Verbs

In (302) the irrealis prefix *u-* has contracted with the aspect prefix *g̱a-*, producing *g̱wa-*. In (303) however, the irrealis prefix has contracted with the object prefix *a-*, resulting in *oo-*. The aspect prefix *g̱a-* drops its vowel and becomes *x̱-* next to the classifier *da-*. The result is *oox̱da-*.

(302) *shag̱waheegín* 'he/she/it would have gotten full'

  (sha- + u- + Ø- + g̱a- + Ø- + -heek + -ín)

(303) *oox̱danaayín* 's/he would have drunk it'

  (a- + u- + Ø- + g̱a- + da- + -naa + -in)

13.2.2 *Na* Conjugation Verbs

Examples (304) and (305) below have the *na-* conjugation prefix. In both, the irrealis prefix *u-* has contracted with the object prefix *a-*, producing *oo-.* The difference between the two prefix strings is the classifier, which in (304) is *Ø-*, and in (305) is *la-*. In (304), the *na-* drops its vowel and the result is *oonga-*. In (305) however, as we saw in several examples above, the *g̱a-* aspect prefix has dropped its vowel and, being next to a consonant-initial classifier (*la-*), has become *x̱-*. The result here is *oonax̱la-*. Notice also that the suffix vowel takes the opposite tone of the verb stem.

(304) *oongas'óowun* 's/he would have chopped it'

  (a- + u- + na- + g̱a- + Ø- + -s'óow + -un)

(305) *oonax̱laxaashín*   's/he would have cut it'

   (a- + u- + na- + g̱a- + la- + -xaash + -in)

13.2.3 *Ga* Conjugation Verbs

As we saw in the *ga* conjugation potential attributive forms above, the preference is for the irrealis prefix *u-* to contract with the conjugation prefix *ga-*, producing *gu-*. In (306) below, this is the only contraction that has taken place, since the classifier is Ø-. In (307), the aspect prefix *ga-* has become *x̱-* before the classifier *la-*, producing *gux̱la-*.

(306) *gug̱agaax̱ín*   's/he would have cried'

    (u- + ga- + g̱a- + Ø- + -g̱aax̱ + -ín)

(307) *gux̱ladzéeyin*   'it would have been difficult'

   (u- + ga- + g̱a- + la- + -dzée + -in)

13.2.4 *G̱a* Conjugation Verbs

Verbs that use the conjugation marker *g̱a-* are the most complex in terms of the prefix combinations. Combining *g̱a-* and *g̱a-* always results in a long vowel on the first *g̱a,* becoming *g̱aag̱a-*. The classifier that follows these determines the rest. In (308) the classifier is Ø- and the result is *ag̱aag̱wa-*. Note here that the irrealis prefix has contracted with the second *g̱a-*, producing *g̱wa-*. An alternate pronunciation for this form is *oog̱aag̱ax̱oox̱ún*, where the irrealis prefix *u-* contracts with the object prefix *a-* instead, producing *oo-* (with no rounding on the aspect prefix *g̱a-* this time). In (309) we see a similar situation, except here the classifier is *la-*, and the aspect prefix *g̱a-* becomes *x̱-*, resulting all together in *ag̱aax̱wla-*. Again, an alternate pronunciation would be *oog̱aax̱lagoowún*, where the irrealis prefix contracts with the object prefix at the beginning of the word instead of the aspect prefix in the middle. Either form is acceptable to most speakers.

(308) *ag̱aag̱wax̱oox̱ún*   's/he would have summoned him'

   (a- + u- + g̱a- + g̱a- + Ø- + -x̱oox̱ + -ún)

(309)   *agaa̱xwlag̱oowún*   's/he would have wiped it'

   (a- + u- + g̱a- + g̱a- + la- + -g̱oo + -ún)

Finally, in (310) below we have the added element of the thematic prefix *ka-*. In this example, the irrealis prefix has contracted with *ka-*, producing *koo-.* When the thematic prefix *ka-* specifically is present, the preference tends to be for the irrealis prefix to contract with *ka-*, as opposed to the object prefix *a-* or the aspect prefix *g̱a-*.

(310)   *akoog̱aa̱xsakeiyín*   's/he would have untangled it'

   (a- + ka- + u- + g̱a- + g̱a- + sa- + -kei + -ín)

13.3 Stem Variation in the Potential

As was noted in Chapter 10, the potential and hortative modes share the same verb stem form. For this reason, the details on verb stem variation will not be repeated here. Table 49 below summarizes the verb stem patterns in the potential, giving an example for each basic stem shape. Note that the examples here are given in the potential mode (and not the potential attributive or potential decessive) for simplicity.

Table 49. Stem Variation in the Potential

Basic Stem Shape ↓	Ø	na, ga, ga
CVV	CVV agwaaxaa 'she might eat it' O-S-Ø-xaa~ (Ø act) 'for S to eat O' CV́V gaduwasháa 'he might get married' O-du-Ø-shaa~ (Ø event; CV́V Imp/Hort/Pot) 'for O to get married'	CVV akoongaahaa 'he might plant it' O-ka-S- Ø-haa~ (na act) 'for S to plant O'
CVVʰ	CVV ooxsitaa 'he might steam it' O-S-s-taaʰ~ (Ø act) 'for S to boil, steam O' CV́V ooxsikóo 'she might know it' O-S-s-kooʰ~ (Ø event; CV́V Imp/Hort/Pot) 'for S to know O'	CVV ungaataa 'she might sleep' S-Ø-taaʰ~ (na act) 'for (singular) S to sleep'
CVVC	CVVC uxsixook 'she might dry it' O-S-s-xook~ (Ø act) 'for S to dry O' CV́C ooxlitsík 'he might bbq it' O-S-l-tseek~ (Ø act; CV́C Hort/Pot) 'for S to broil O slowly'	CVVC oongaaxaash 'he might cut it' O-S-Ø-xaash~ (na act) 'for S to cut O with knife'
CV́VC	CV́VC uxsiwáat 'he might raise her' O-S-s-wáat~ (Ø act) 'for S to raise O' CV́C ookgaachák 'she might pack it' O-ka-S-Ø-cháak~ (Ø act; CV́C Hort/Pot) 'for S to pack O'	CV́VC agaaxwlisháat 'she might hold it' O-S-l-sháat~ (ga act) 'for S to hold, retain O'
CV́VC'	CV́VC' ooxsi.áat' 'she might chill it' O-S-s-.áat'~ (Ø act) 'for S to make O cold' CV́C' oogaaxás' 'he might scrape it' O-S-Ø-xáas'~ (Ø act; CV́C' Hort/Pot) 'for S to scrape O'	CV́VC' oongaa.óos' 'he might wash it' O-S-Ø-.óos'~ (na act) 'for S to wash O'