Expressing Future Certainty in Comox

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Abstract: In addition to the normal future enclitic sem in Comox, there is a sequence of the two enclitics sem plus t. The difference is simple future versus a more emphatic future expressing the speaker’s certainty that an event is sure to happen. When the simple future is contrasted with the sequence sem plus t, the rhetorical force of the simple future becomes seemingly tentative or hypothetical. Also addressed are the Salish voiced stops and the origin of the name Comox.

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1 The simple future

The future is regularly expressed by the enclitic sem as follows:

(1) a. qwel’ chian sem [qʷəlʔ cəʕən səm] come 1SG.SBJ FUT ‘I will come.’
b. qwel’ chiat sem [qʷəlʔ cəʔt səm] come 1PL.SBJ FUT ‘We will come.’
c. qwel’ chiawh sem [qʷəlʔ cəʕxʷ səm] come 2SG.SBJ FUT ‘You’ll come.’
d. qwel’ chiap sem [qʷəlʔ cəʔp səm] come 2PL.SBJ FUT ‘You’ll come.’
e. qwel’ sem [qʷəlʔ səm] come FUT ‘He/she/it/they will come.’

These full form pronominal enclitics occur after one-syllable predicates. Reduced forms occur after polysyllabic predicates as well as in historically frozen forms. Here are the reduced forms.

1 The earliest documentation of this language was in 1857 by George Gibbs. See Section 6 of this paper.
2 The data given herein were not elicited, but gleaned from interactions with native speakers from 1969 to 1980. Indeed, these data may not be amenable to elicitation.
The form *zem* is historically the */n/ of the first person singular marker */-an/ plus the future enclitic */səm/, yielding the first person future enclitic */təsəm/. This historical */n/ combines with the pan-Salish nominalizer */s/ to yield the first person singular possessive */tθə/.5

2 The future expressed by the two enclitics *sem* plus *t*

From 1969 to 1980, one of the methods that Mary George and I had for her to teach me her language was as follows. I would describe a hypothetical situation to her and she would tell it back to me in Sliammon. This is not the more common sentence by sentence elicitation, but is meant to obtain a Sliammon description of various scenarios. One description was of a non-existent fire on Harwood Island, a part of the Sliammon reserve. The description that Mary George gave contained the following sentence:

(3) *ot sem čhelh iy tl’aqw sem t te q’aq’twh*  
[ʔot səm čil ʔey ƛ̉aqʷ səm t te qaqtəʷ]  
if FUT rain and extinguish FUT [t] the (ongoing) fire  
‘If it rains, then the fire will go out.’

In this sentence, the plain future marker [səm] is opposed to the enclitic sequence [səm t] indicating certainty, higher likelihood. Mary George was definite that the

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5 This transcription system is based on Davis (2005) and on Davis (2012) Section 11 Spelling and Pronunciation.

4 Here [č] becomes [š] syllable initially before [t]. The same phenomenon is seen in Slavic languages.

5 This analysis was initially noted by Wayne Suttles (personal communication). The ejective affricate */tθ/ comes from historical */tθ/ but the plain affricate */tθ/ comes from historical */n+s/. The n+s is first person singular plus */s/ in the future suffix */səm/ or historical */s/ nominalizer : [ns]→[dθ]→[tθ]. This change reflects the areal phenomenon of nasals being realized as voiced stops.
consonant [t] was indeed present. This is an example of the two constructions being contrasted in the same sentence.

When my wife and I left in 1972 to be gone for a year, Mary George told us

(4a) chia’at  zem    k’wenanapi  e    kw    chîanas
       [cεʔeʔt    t̩θam    k̉ʷonanape  ə    k̉w    čê.emp]  
short.time  1SG.SBJ.FUT  see-RESULT.TR-2PL  ART  some  
sem        z’ok’w  
səm        t̩θok’w  
FUT        day  
‘I’ll see you (PL) someday.’

Then she repeated this more emphatically, expressing intent rather than simple future

(4b) chia’at  zem    t    k’wenanapi  e    kw    chîanas  sem    t    z’ok’w
       [cεʔeʔt    t̩θam    k̉ʷonanape  ə    k̉w    čê.emp  səm    t    t̩θok’w]  
One time Mary George, my wife, and I were about to go into town. Mary George said

(5) ‘ewk’w   shtem   t   thoho
       [ʔuokw    štəm    t    ōoho]  
all        1PL.SBJ.FUT  [t]  are-going  

and then repeated in English “we’ll all go together”, meaning that we will surely be together.

Other examples include:

(6) chianey  sem    t   e    tho    xana-t   e    te    kiapey-s
       [cεniy  səm    t    ə    ōo    xanaʔe  ə    te    k̉ʷepiys]  
I FUT [t] CLEFT go give-him OBL the coffee-his  
‘I will (be the one to) give him his coffee.’

(7) nesh   a    chwhem   t    lhwumot
       [niʃ    a    c̉ʷəm    t    lhwumot]  
here   Q  2SG.SBJ.FUT [t] stay  
‘Are you going to stay (behind)?’

(8) thamshia’ qomay ey   qaǰit   zem   t   tl’alhsem
       [θəmʃiʔaʔ  qomay  iy  qaǰit  t̩θam    t  ɬalsəm]  
twenty years and still 1SG.SBJ.FUT [t] strong  
‘In twenty years I’ll still be strong.’

These would be equally grammatical without [t], but the addition of [t] makes each one more a statement of certainty.

6 This word chîanas was used by Tommy Paul in many of his explanations. Mary George translated it into English as ‘some’ when she said it and when Tommy Paul said it.
Although the [t] is not grammatically required, some situations seem to require [t] for their rhetorical force:

(9) **hiya zem t tho**

[heya tθem t ðo]

immediate 1SG.SBJ.FUT [t] go

‘I’ll go right now.’

(10) **hiya zem t qwel’ e kw tl’i**

[heya tθem t qʷelʔ o kW tl’i]

immediate 1SG.SBJ.FUT [t] come PREP ART fast

‘I’ll come right away.’

(11) **kwekwtem es chia’at, qwayigan ‘iyajem sem t**

[kʷokʷtem ʔes c’ʔet qʷayegan ʔeyajem sam t]

sick STAT right.now opinion get.better FUT [t]

‘He’s sick right now, but he’ll (surely) get better.’

(12) **ho ga, qi-qiy-t-h-em sem t**

[ho ga qeqeθem sam t]

go suggestion CV-beat-TR-you-PASS FUT [t]

‘Go, they’ll (surely) beat you up.’

(13) **ganigan ch kwes ’i’ilhtenstomayít, chianey sem t**

[gəneɣan c’kʷas ʔeʔelstomayit, c’eʔniy sam t]

give.up I SUBORD they.feed.me I FUT [t]

‘I give up (having) them feed me, I’ll be feeding myself.’

In the data collected from 1969 to 1980, this enclitic [t] does not occur in a clause introduced by ‘ot or ga (see example (3) above).

Talking about the story of T’al
‘If you guys don’t (take the) warning, if you guys might not (take the) warning,...’

‘T’al will surely come down and take you to his place.’

More recently, I have said goodbye on the phone to Marion Harry by saying

‘I will talk with you soon.’

and she has replied with the more emphatic

‘I will (certainly) talk with you soon.’

3 Hagège recorded another instance of the enclitic t

Hagège (1981:162) gives the following two sentences:

‘I really fear that you might leave me’.

7 For an explanation of ’ot and ga as subordinators, see Davis (2012).

8 The intransitive xigap means ‘be warned’ or ‘heed a warning’ and can be transitivized, just as other predicates in Coast Salish languages are intransitive until a transitive suffix is added, even though they must be translated into European languages by transitive verbs, English et cetera not having morphologically or syntactically intransitive equivalents.

9 This is from the common coastal story about the basket ogre. However, when Noel George Harry (born circa 1890) told the story, along with its moral and present-day origin of mosquitoes and horseflies, he was definite that this was a basket ogre, a male.

10 The causative includes some situations which can only be considered comitative.

11 For an explanation of this use of ga, see Davis (2012).
Hagège’s translation is ‘I think you want to go’; the grammar indicates that the literal translation is ‘[I] really think that it is desirable that you go’, meaning that I really think you want to go. Unlike the previous sentence, in this sentence the second matrix predicate [χaƛ] is seemingly impersonal, with the suffix [-s] being required by the nominalizing proclitic [s]. Compare the following;

(19a)  
th  xatl’  kwe-th  tho  
[θ  χaƛ  kwθ  0θ]  
2SG.POSS  want  ART-2SG.POSS  go  
‘You want to go.’

(19b)  
xatl’  kwe-th  tho  
[χaƛ  kwθ  0θ]  
want  ART-2SG.POSS  go  
‘You want to go.’

Here both sentences have the same meaning and intent, but when the second sentence is further subordinated by the nominal proclitic, a subject marker is required. Subjects of nominalized clauses are expressed by possessive affixes. In the absence of the 2SG.POSS the 3.POSS is added, but does not mean that a third person wants you to go.

Example (18) shows that this [t] is an enclitic, not a suffix. Compare yəm-
igan-t-as ‘kick-ribs-INTENT-TR-AGENT’ where the /n/ of the lexical suffix disappears before the intent transitive suffix to yield [yɪmegatás] ‘he kicked him in the ribs’.

4  Hagège noted another expression of emphasis in Comox

Hagège (1978) presents examples of a number of lexical suffixes, among them

(20)  ‘ah-lhalh  ch  
[ʔahlɬɬ  c]  
sore-throat  I  
‘I have a sore throat.’

He then contrasts this sentence with the same description without a lexical suffix

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12 This s is not a prefix, but a proclitic nominalizing an entire subordinate clause.
13 This θh, or [θ], hides the underlying s nominalizing proclitic by occupying the same syntactic slot.
(21) ’ah tez sayhalh
[ʔah tətʰ sayɬəl]
sore my throat
‘I really have a sore throat.’

He then writes “... the opposition between synthetic solution (lexical suffixation) and syntactic solution in Comox ... marks rather, the relation of ordinary to emphatic. In my texts, the syntactic solution is statistically less frequent than the synthetic one.”

5 Emphasis and the Salish change of nasal to voiced stop

Among the varieties of Coast Salish, those spoken in the Puget Sound area are noted for having the voiced stops /b/ and /d/ where other varieties have /m/ and /n/. One explanation of this sound shift can be found in the emphatic pronunciation of Noel George Harry, who was born circa 1890 in Church House but lived in Sliammon during the last years of his life. Examples include /ǰədis/ for /ǰənis/ ‘tooth’ and /baǰaθ/ for /maǰaθ/ ‘meat’. Noel George Harry regularly pronounced the nasals, but when he wanted to emphasize what he was saying, he would substitute the voiced stops.

Ronald Beaumont says that the /b/ and /d/ pronunciations were used in Sechelt for baby talk (personal communication).

6 Origin of the name Comox

The earliest documentation of this language was written in 1857 by George Gibbs and published in 1877. In his introduction, Gibbs notes that “Their own name is S’tlaht-tohlt-hu; that of S’ko-mook is the one given them by the Uguultas.” Here Gibbs (or the typesetter) gives a second spelling for the name. This word list is then a vocabulary of Thalholhtwh [θəloltɫ], or Island Comox. (nota bene: The last speaker of Island Comox substituted [s] for [θ], unlike what my teachers resident at Sliammon said 1969–1974. Franz Boas recorded the name as Çatloltq, using ç to represent [θ].) The spelling Ko-mookhs may be Gibbs’ attempt to write /qayməçw/ [qayməçw] which would mean ‘person of’ = ‘person’ /qayməç/ plus ‘of’ /s/. This, then, would be the first word of a two-word phrase which remains incomplete. It is probable that the speaker said the two syllables of this word slowly and separately as Gibbs wrote them down. Assuming that Gibbs was an English-dominant speaker, the spelling “ko” would approximate the sound of /qa/ and the spelling “mookhs” would approximate the sound of /məçw/ with the /y/ being lost during the attempt to pronounce in such a way as to satisfy an unfamiliar white man.
References


