

# Reflexes of Proto-Salish *\*ʔas-* Stative and *\*ʔis-* Durative in Today's Comox

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**Abstract:** Two Proto-Salish prefixes identified by Stanley Newman (1976) are preserved in a limited number of vocabulary items in the language of the Homalco, Klahoose, and Sliammon speakers. In previous publications, their language has been known collectively as Mainland Comox.

**Keywords:** Mainland Comox, historical phonology, stative, durative, grammatical tone

## 1 Introduction

Stanley Newman (1976:231) distinguishes between Proto-Salish *\*ʔas/* *stative* and Proto-Salish *\*ʔis/* *continuative* or *durative*. This paper presents the homophonous phonetic residues as they appear in Mainland Comox and distinguishes them from the proclitic */s/* nominalizer. Section 2 presents the nominalizing proclitic with its requirement that the subject of the nominalized phrase be indicated by a pronominal marker from the possessive paradigm. Section 3 presents the imperfective, which overlaps semantically with the durative. Sections 4 and 5 present the most frequent formation of the durative and stative. Sections 6 and 7 present additional data. Section 8 presents the *\*/s-/* prefix of the durative and stative. Section 9 presents time expressions with the Proto-Salish *\*/s-/* prefix. The examples in sections 8 and 9 do *not* require a pronominal marker. Section 10 is a note on how the Proto-Salish */s/* nominalizer has been absorbed into the first person singular possessive pronoun and Section 11 is a history of the names for this language.

## 2 The */s/* nominalizing proclitic

Mainland Comox lacks the prefixes prominent in other Coast Salish languages. Even the pan-Salish *\*s* nominalizer remains only as a proclitic, not as a prefix. The following examples of the proclitic */s/* nominalizer show that the nominalized phrase *requires* that a third person subject be marked by the possessive suffix *-s/* 'his/her/its/their' or *-ap/* 'your (plural)' or by a preposed possessive pronoun.

- (1) *texwnîwhas s whes qwel'*. (1') ... *s whe-s* ...  
[təχ<sup>w</sup>neç<sup>w</sup>ʌs s ç<sup>w</sup>ʊs q<sup>w</sup>ɔlʔ]  
'She knows that he didn't come.' [... s ç<sup>w</sup>ʊs ...]  
*texw* 'know' + *(n)ewh* 'result transitive' + *-î-* 'stative' + *-as* '(s)he'
- (2) *pakwewh sht s whekwts.* (2') ... *s whekwt-s*  
[pak<sup>w</sup>ʊç<sup>w</sup> št s ç<sup>w</sup>ʊk<sup>w</sup>ts]  
'We noticed that she wasn't there.' [... s ç<sup>w</sup>ʊk<sup>w</sup>ts]  
*pakw* 'observe' + *ewh* 'result transitive' + *sht* 'we'
- (3) *xaxayastîwh sht s whekwts.*  
[χaxayestç<sup>w</sup> št s ç<sup>w</sup>ʊk<sup>w</sup>ts]  
'We found it strange that she wasn't there.' (from the story "Christine Falls Down")  
*xaxaya* 'strange' + *s(t)wh* 'causative' + *-î-* 'stative' + *sht* 'we'

- (4) *lhaxmot s wha'agewhs she pukws.* (4') ... *s wha'ag-ewh-s ...*  
 [laxmot s ɕwaʔagoɕ<sup>w</sup>s ši puk<sup>w</sup>s] [... s ɕwaʔagoɕ<sup>w</sup>s ...]  
 'It's bad that he lost his book.' '... that lost result-transitive his/he ...'  
*lhax* 'bad' (with rhetorical vowel ablaut) + *mot* 'really' + *wha'ag-* 'lose'
- (5) *'ey'mot s qwel'ap.* (6) *'ey'mot teth qwel'.*  
 [ʔi:ʔmot s q<sup>w</sup>ɔlʔap] [ʔi:ʔmot təθ q<sup>w</sup>ɔlʔ]  
 'It's good that you guys came (welcome).' 'It's good that you came (welcome).'<sup>1</sup>  
*'ey'* 'good' + *mot* 'really' + *s* 'that' + *qwel'* 'come' + *-ap* 'you (plural)'

In example (6), the second person singular possessive pronoun /θ/ occupies the same syntactic slot as the /s/ nominalizing proclitic, with the result that the proclitic is hidden. The pronoun /θ/ is here phonetically attached to the preceding article /tə/. See also the comment after example (87).

### 3 The imperfective

Many predicates in Comox use CV- reduplication to show ongoing action or ongoing state.

- (7) *'axeth* (8) *'a'axeth*  
 [ʔaxəθ] [ʔaʔaxəθ] (compare with (46) below)  
 'lie down' 'moving to lie down'
- (9) *lhuk'w* (10) *lhulhuk'w*  
 [lʉk<sup>w</sup>] [lʉlʉk<sup>w</sup>]  
 'fly' 'be flying'
- (11) *qwel'* (12) *qweqwel'*  
 [q<sup>w</sup>ɔlʔ] [q<sup>w</sup>ɔq<sup>w</sup>ɔlʔ]  
 'come' 'be coming'
- (13) *seyawus* (lexical suffix *-awus*) (14) *seseyawus*  
 [siyawus] [sɛsiyawus]  
 'get drunk' 'be drunk'
- (15) *qay'* (16) *qaqay'*  
 [qayʔ] [qaqayʔ]  
 'die' = become dead 'be dead'

The following predicate has to date been recorded only in the imperfective and is thus semantically parallel with example (22).

- (17) *'o'omat* (intent transitive)  
 [ʔoʔomat]  
 'lazy' (discinclined to do a specific task)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is the greeting that Mary Paul gave to visitors to her house in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> If you search for the term "lazy" in the Sliammon app and *listen to the audio*, you will hear that all recorded speakers are pronouncing this in the imperfective with initial CV- reduplication, including even the imperative example. The written transcription is partially inaccurate. The word *'o'omat* is best expressed by the Spanish expression *no tener ganas*.

#### 4 The durative

But some predicates “can’t be doubled” (as Bill Galligos, born 1908, said). Ongoing action or state is expressed by the durative, as in examples (1) and (3) above.

- (18) *texwnewh* (19) *texwnîwh* (durative -î- infix)  
[tɔχ<sup>w</sup>noç<sup>w</sup>] [tɔχ<sup>w</sup>neç<sup>w</sup>]  
‘realize something, get to know about it’ ‘know it’
- (20) *k’wenewh* (result transitive) (21) *k’wenît* (durative -î- infix)  
[k<sup>w</sup>ɔnoç<sup>w</sup>] [tɔχ<sup>w</sup>neç<sup>w</sup>] (compare with (26) below)  
‘see it’ ‘be seeing or looking at it’

Contrast this with:

- (22) *k’wet* (intent transitive)  
[k<sup>w</sup>ɔt] (here the underlying {N} is deleted before {T})  
‘look (at it)’

This predicate has to date been recorded only in the durative and is thus semantically parallel with example (17):

- (23) *p’a’p’îm*  
[pa<sup>a</sup>p<sup>a</sup>em] (compare phonetics with (38) and (40) below)  
‘work; be working’

#### 5 The stative

The stative is formed in the same way as the durative. It must be noted that here and above there is a higher tone on the vowel marked with a circumflex; the tone serves as a grammatical marker.<sup>3</sup>

- (25) *tew’* (here /ə/ ~ /a/ (26) *ta’gît* (stative -ît suffix)  
[tu:ʔ] (and {W} + vowel → /g/) [ta<sup>a</sup>gît] (compare with (20) above)  
‘freeze’ ‘frozen’
- (27) *t’elk’et* (intent transitive) (28) *t’elîk’* (stative -î- infix)  
[tɔlkɛt] [tɔlik]  
‘make a hole in something’ ‘something with a hole in it’
- (29) *tlepwh* (intransitive) (30) *tlepîwh* (stative -î- infix)  
[λɔpç<sup>w</sup>] [λɔpîç<sup>w</sup>]  
‘(a long object) to break (in the middle)’ ‘(a long object) broken (in the middle)’

<sup>3</sup> “Grammatical tone is the distinctive pitch which marks contrasts in grammatical features...” (SIL Glossary of Linguistic Terms); “In Mainland Comox, stress and pitch operate either partially or totally independently of one another; the strongest stress and the highest pitch do not usually occur on the same syllable either at the sentence level or at the word level.” (Davis 1970:21–22)

- (31) *tlexwt* (intent transitive)  
[λɔχ<sup>w</sup>t]  
'spit'  
(cp. Sechelt *lhexwt* 'to spit it out')
- (32) *tlexwît* (stative -î suffix)  
[λɔχ<sup>w</sup>εt]  
'spittle'
- (33) *peyesh*  
[piyiš]  
'descend'
- (34) *peyt* (stative -t suffix)  
[pi:t]  
'low; down'
- (35) *shia'*  
[š<sup>y</sup>æʔ]  
'ascend'
- (36) *shia't* (stative -t suffix)  
[š<sup>y</sup>æʔt]  
'high'
- (37) *p'eq'* (here /ə/ ~ /a/)  
[pʌq̣]  
'smoke'
- (38) *p'a'q'im*  
[pʌ<sup>a</sup>q̣em]<sup>4</sup>  
'emitting smoke'
- (39) *metl'*  
[mʌλ̣]  
'calm'
- (40) *ma'tl'im*  
[ma<sup>a</sup>λ̣em]  
'a calm area of water'
- (41) *sechem* (intransitive)  
[siçum]  
'itch'
- (42) *sechîm*  
[siçim]  
'itchy'
- (43) *qayiwš* (lexical suffix -iws)  
[qayios]  
'tired'
- (44) *qayigîš* (here {W} + vowel → /g/)  
[qayigis]  
'totally exhausted'
- (45) *'axeth*  
[ʔaxəθ]  
'lie down'
- (46) *'axîth* (stative -î- infix)  
[ʔaxεθ] (compare with (8) above)  
'be lying down'
- (47) *jianwh*  
[j<sup>y</sup>enç<sup>w</sup>]  
'fish'
- (48) *jianîwh* (stative -î- infix)  
[j<sup>y</sup>eniç<sup>w</sup>]  
characterized by knowing about fish or  
being good at fishing (from the expla-  
nation about twins told by Tommy Paul)
- (49) *tl'ems*  
[λʌms]  
'house'
- (50) *tl'emîš kw qayiwmiwh*  
[λʌmεš kw qayioμιç<sup>w</sup>]  
'the people had houses'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Here the notation for a long or rearticulated vowel is borrowed from Sapir (1915). Hagege (1981) noted this feature of pronunciation, although he did not transcribe it.

<sup>5</sup> This is a direct quote from Noel George Harry in the introductory lines of the story "Killing the Wind"; these are *his* words, not the linguist's, as shown by the double quotation marks.

## 6 Another morphological process

Here is an additional way to derive attributions, insertion of [h] in V<sub>2</sub> as in the following. This method of derivation yields the same meaning as in Section 5, but is morphologically different.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (51) <i>gaqath</i><br>[gaqaθ]<br>'husband'  | (52) <i>gaqahâth</i><br>[gaqahaθ]<br>'has a husband' = 'married (woman)'                               |
| (53) <i>salhtiw</i><br>[sałtɔ]<br>'wife'  | (54) <i>salhtihîw</i><br>[sałteheɔ]<br>'has a wife' = 'married (man)'                                  |
| (55) <i>t'eshiqw</i> (lexical suffix <i>-iqw</i> )<br>[tʃʃε <sup>ε</sup> q <sup>w</sup> ]<br>'snot, nasal mucous' | (56) <i>t'eshihîqw</i><br>[tʃʃεhe <sup>ε</sup> q <sup>w</sup> ]<br>'snotty (has nasal mucous smeared)' |
| (57) <i>ch'iaq'</i><br>[č <sup>y</sup> εq]<br>'fence'   | (58) <i>ch'iahâq'</i><br>[č <sup>y</sup> ehεq]<br>'fenced (e.g. a fenced garden)'                      |
| (59) <i>q'aga</i><br>[q̣aga]<br>'cane, waling stick'  | (60) <i>i'imash q'agahâ</i><br>[ʔεʔεmɔʃ q̣agaha]<br>'walking with a cane'                              |

## 7 A periphrastic way to indicate possessive

The predicate *na'* [naʔ] indicates possession.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (61) <i>z na' ~ 'ez na'</i><br>[ʔə <sup>θ</sup> naʔ]<br>'my, mine' | (62) <i>'ems na'</i><br>[ʔəms naʔ]<br>'our, ours' |
|--|---|

As in a sentence volunteered by Bill Galligos:

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| (63) <i>'ez na' ti'i ch'iano.</i><br>[ʔə <sup>θ</sup> naʔ tɛʔε čéɔno] <sup>6</sup><br>"That's my dog." <sup>7</sup> = 'That dog is mine.' | (64) <i>th na' ~ 'eth na'</i><br>[ʔəθ naʔ]<br>'your, yours (singular)' | (65) <i>na'ap</i><br>[naʔap]<br>'your, yours (plural)' |
|---|--|--|

<sup>6</sup> Bill Galligos said that 'dog' has "two and a half" syllables. This observation exemplifies that the Coast Salish languages are not syllable-timed, like European languages, but are mora-timed; see also Davis (2005) and Davis (2015). Hoard (1978) describes the situation without using the word "mora".

<sup>7</sup> This is a direct quote from Bill Galligos; these are *his* words, not the linguist's, as shown by the double quotation marks.

- (66) *na's*  
[naʔs]  
'his, her, hers, its, their, theirs'
- (67) *na'it*  
[nɛʔɛt] ~ [naʔat]<sup>8</sup>  
'their, theirs'

The next examples present 'whose?' which requires the prefix /s-/, a reflex from Proto-Salish.

## 8 Reflexes of the Proto-Salish durative and stative prefixes

Stanley Newman reconstructs the Proto-Salish stative prefix as \*/ʔas-/ and the prefix for continuative/durative as \*/ʔis-/. Their reflexes in Comox are not distinguishable.

- (68) *gat sna'* (*gat* = 'who?')  
[gʌt snaʔ]  
'whose?'

This has the Proto-Salish /s-/ prefix. More frequent is the following, which is doubly marked for attribution by both the /s-/ prefix and the additional /-h-/:

- (69) *gat snaha*  
[gʌt snaha]  
'whose?'

Note that these words do not have the possessive suffix required by the /s/ nominalizer.

- (70) *k'wik'wichiy*  
[ḳ'wiḳ'iči:]  
'bothering'
- (71) *sk'wichiy*<sup>9</sup>  
[sḳ'iči:]  
'habitually bothersome'
- (72) *tl'eq*  
[ʔʌq]  
'go outside'
- (73) *'astl'q*  
[ʔasʔq]<sup>10</sup>  
'be outside'
- (74) *sqwajem*  
[sq̣'ajum]  
'poor (an ongoing condition)'

<sup>8</sup> The plural possessive suffix is *-it*, but these are the only two pronunciations of this item recorded. Bill Galligos volunteered the minimal pair *na'it newhilh* [nɛʔɛt nɔçʷɪt] 'their (own) boat' versus *ni'it te newhilh* [nɛ:ʔɛt tɔ nɔçʷɪt] 'the boat's in the way' with a longer root vowel and higher tone on the second vowel. Hagège (1981:136) gives the form *te na'at* [tɔ naʔat] 'theirs' (retranscribed here to fit the rest of this paper). These two pronunciations seem to be instances of V?V assimilation. Even in the 1970s the suffix *-s* was commonly being used for 'theirs' and the suffix *-it* was rare.

<sup>9</sup> Compare Sechelt *k'wichil* 'be a bother' and *sk'wichil* 'a mischief maker/nuisance' with final /-l/.

<sup>10</sup> Mary George (born 1924) kept the [ʔ] in her pronunciation of three morae, illustrated by the transcription [ʔas.ʔ.q] using the notation in Hoard (1978). Compare Sechelt *'astl'q* 'be outside' where the [ʔ] is also preserved.

## 9 Time expressions

Expressions of time do not have the third person /-s/ suffix; the /s-/ is not a nominalizer. They are the most common expression of the Proto-Salish \*/s-/ stative prefix.

- (75) *sjiasolh* (overt past tense *-olh*)  
 [sʲʷɛsoʔ]  
 ‘yesterday’

The word for ‘yesterday’ has not been recorded without the /s-/ prefix. Indeed, Marion Harry (born 1937) corrected me when I wrote it that way once.

- (76) *z’ok’w*  
 [tʰokʷ]  
 ‘day; bright’

- (77) *’esz’ok’w ~ sz’ok’w*  
 [ʔAsʰokʷ]  
 ‘today’

- (78) *nanat*  
 [nanat]  
 ‘evening’

- (79) *snanat*  
 [snanat]  
 ‘this evening’

- (80) *kwiy’* (here {Y} + vowel → /j/)  
 [kʷi:ʔ]  
 ‘morning; also morrow’<sup>11</sup>

- (81) *skwijolh* (overt past tense *-olh*)  
 [skʷijolʔ]  
 ‘this morning (past)’

- (82) *chia’at*  
 [čʲɛʔɛt]  
 ‘short period of time’

- (83) *schia’at ~ ’eschia’at*  
 [ʔAsčʲɛʔɛt]  
 ‘now’

- (84) *xoxw*  
 [χʷoχʷ]  
 ‘long period of time’

- (85) *whe xoxwas*  
 [çʷoχʷas]  
 ‘not long (until/before ...)’

- (86) *sxoxolh* (overt past tense *-olh*)  
 [sχʷoχʷolʔ]  
 ‘long ago’

This prefix can also act like a proclitic and be attached to a preceding article:

- (87) *kwes xoxolh*  
 [kʷəsχʷoχʷolʔ]  
 ‘long ago’

Neither the /s/ nominalizer nor the /s-/ stative has been noted attaching to any preceding article other than /kʷ/. If it cannot attach to the article /tə/, that may be because the sequence [təs] is too

<sup>11</sup> Tommy Paul used the phrase “z’ok’w kwiy’” [tʰokʷ kʷi:ʔ] to mean ‘the next day’ in the context of telling a story. Thus [kʷi:ʔ] has a similar range of meanings as Spanish *mañana*.

phonetically similar to [təθ], as in examples (5) and (6) above. The same phonetic restrictions may apply to both /s/ nominalizer and /s-/ stative.

## 10 A final note on Newman

“The possessive pronominal prefixes of Salish have been lost in ... Com[ox], a language of the northernmost branch of the Coast Salish groups.” (Newman 1976:229)

In 1978, Wayne Suttles (personal communication) pointed out that Proto-Salish first person singular /n/ combines with the nominalizer /s/ to yield the lamino-alveolar affricate /t<sup>θ</sup>/ in Comox, as in Musqueam synchronically. In other words, the /n/ has not really been lost, but has become disguised. This is the only instance of the phoneme /t<sup>θ</sup>/ in Comox. The lamino-alveolar affricate /t<sup>θ</sup>/ corresponds to /t<sup>s</sup>/ and the lamino-alveolar fricative /θ/ corresponds to /t<sup>s</sup>/ in Sechelt, being pronounced at the same point of articulation but shifting the manner of articulation from a groove affricate to a slit fricative. Thus /θ/ comes from historical \*/t<sup>s</sup>/, and /t<sup>θ</sup>/ comes from historical \*/t<sup>s</sup>/, but /t<sup>θ</sup>/ comes from historical \*/n+s/ while remaining lamino-alveolar.

This latter change can be expressed as [ns]→[d<sup>s</sup>]→[t<sup>θ</sup>], with the first person singular [n] combining with the [s] of the future enclitic [səm] or historical [s] nominalizer. It also combines with [sa<sup>a</sup> ga] ‘in that case’ or ‘as a consequence’ to yield [t<sup>θ</sup>a<sup>a</sup> ga].

The shift [n] to [d] reflects the areal variation of nasal and stop. Noel George Harry (born circa 1890; father-in-law of Bill Galligos) sometimes pronounced /m/ as [b] and /n/ as [d] for rhetorical emphasis.

## 11 A note on the name(s) of this language

The earliest mention of this language was written by George Gibbs in 1857 and published in 1877. In his introduction, Gibbs (1877) notes that “Their own name is S’tlaht-tolht-hu; that of S’komook is the one given them by the Uguultas.” Here Gibbs (or the typesetter) gives a second spelling for the name. The word list is recognizable as a vocabulary of Thalholhtwh [θałohtç<sup>w</sup>] — Island Comox.

In 1886, Franz Boas recorded the name of Island Comox as Çal’oltq, where the q stood for several fricatives including the rounded ich-laut [ç<sup>w</sup>]. In 1915 Sapir used the name Comox. Thalholhtwh [θałohtç<sup>w</sup>] was the name that Noel George Harry (born circa 1890) volunteered in 1969 for the island dialect. The last speaker of Island Comox substituted [s] for [θ] (Harris 1977), but one last speaker is not more authoritative than the hundreds of speakers who came before.

The spelling Ko-mookhs may be Gibbs’ attempt to write /qaymæç<sup>w</sup>s/ [qaymøç<sup>w</sup>s] which would mean ‘person of’ = /qaymæç<sup>w</sup>/ [qaymøç<sup>w</sup>] plus ‘of’ /s/. This would be the first word of a two-word phrase which remains incomplete. Probably the speaker said the two syllables of this word slowly and separately as Gibbs wrote them down. Gibbs was an English-dominant speaker, so the spelling “ko” would be how he wrote the sound of [qa] as in Montler (2018) and the spelling “mookhs” would be how he wrote [møç<sup>w</sup>s] with the [y] being lost while the speaker was attempting to pronounce in a way that would satisfy this unfamiliar white man.

Although Homalco, Klahoose, and Sliammon have been known collectively as Mainland Comox, many speakers today call it /ʔayʔajuθəm/ [ʔayʔajuθəm] ~ [ʔayʔajoθəm], which means ‘speaking properly’. However, in the past this term was *not* used to refer to these three speech communities exclusively. In the 1960s Mary Paul and her niece overheard other First Nations people speaking and the niece asked what these strangers were speaking. Mary Paul responded that they were speaking /ʔayʔajuθəm/. Bill Galligos contrasted this term with /χaλuθqin/ [χaλoθqen] which he said means ‘the difficult language’ referring to the English language.

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