

# On the absence of evidence for nominal tense: The ʔayʔajuθəm past marker *-ot*\*

MARIANNE HUIJSMANS  
*University of Alberta*

## 1 Introduction

In a number of Salish languages, the same morpheme that is used to indicate the past on verbs also occurs on nouns (e.g., Burton 1997, Wiltschko 2003, Matthewson 2005). On nouns, the past marker typically indicates that the referent of the DP is dead or destroyed, and for possessed nouns, the past marker can indicate that the possession relation no longer holds. The past marker on nouns is therefore frequently translated into English using adjectives like ‘late’, ‘former’, or ‘ex’.

Prior analyses differ in whether they treat the past marker as actually marking nominal tense. Burton (1997) proposes that the past marker on nouns in Halkomelem encodes past tense on nouns, while Wiltschko (2003) argues that it realizes an interpretable tense feature on D. In contrast, Matthewson (2005) argues that the ‘past tense’ morphemes found on nouns in St’át’imcets and Halkomelem are really temporal modifiers that

---

\* I am deeply grateful to all the speakers who have shared their language and insights with me over the years, especially Elsie Paul, Phyllis Dominic, Freddie Louie, Betty Wilson, and late Joanne Francis, whom I consulted at different points on this topic. Without their resilience and dedication to keeping their language alive, this work would not be possible. I am also grateful to the audience at ICSNL 54 for helpful discussion of a much earlier version of part of this work. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Jacobs Research Funds, a SSHRC Insight grant #435-2016-1694 awarded to Henry Davis, and start up funds from the University of Alberta that have made this research possible.

This paper is dedicated to Hotze Rullmann, who has been an important mentor throughout my development as a semanticist. Though Hotze was not officially on my committee during my time as a graduate student at UBC, he has always been very generous with feedback on presentations, abstracts, and papers, and his feedback has never failed to be important, both for his attention to detail and his precision of thought. I have also learnt a lot from him through participating in several research groups with him, collaborating with him on several occasions, and being his teaching assistant for an upper-level undergraduate semantics class. Thank you, Hotze, and wishing you a very happy birthday!

optionally attach to nouns and verbs. Under this analysis, tense is not part of the functional architecture of DPs in St'át'imcets and Halkomelem.

A similar debate exists for past markers in Guaraní languages. Thomas (2012, 2014) argues that a past marker that occurs on nouns in Mbyá is a nominal tense, while Tonhauser (2006, 2007) argues that its cognate in Paraguayan Guaraní is a predicate modifier that is not a true nominal tense.

In this paper, I examine the cross-category use of the past marker in another Salish language, ʔayʔajuθəm (a.k.a. Comox-Sliammon; ISO: coo). I argue that the past marker *-oł* in ʔayʔajuθəm does not occupy T in either clausal or nominal contexts, presenting novel data that shows that *-oł* does not have a fixed syntactic position and can apply to different constituents. I therefore argue that in both clausal and nominal environments, *-oł* acts as a temporal modifier and provide a preliminary semantics where it combines with a predicate to add a presupposition restricting the reference time for the predicate to the past.

My analysis of *-oł* therefore supports Matthewson's (2005) position that the past markers in Halkomelem and St'át'imcets are temporal modifiers rather than tense. Crucially, following Matthewson's argumentation for these other languages, since *-oł* is not a morphological realization of T in ʔayʔajuθəm, its presence on nouns cannot be used to argue for a tense projection in nominal environments or a tense feature on D.

This paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, I provide language background, and in Section 3, I provide theoretical background. In Section 4, I briefly discuss ʔayʔajuθəm tense and the temporal interpretation of DPs. In Section 5, I discuss the interpretation of *-oł* on verbs, nouns, and adjectives. In Section 6, I present arguments that *-oł* is not a past tense but rather a temporal modifier. In Section 7, I provide a preliminary analysis of *-oł*.

## 2 Language background

ʔayʔajuθəm is a Central Salish language, the ancestral language of the Tla'amin, Homalco, Klahoose, and K'ómoks Nations,<sup>1</sup> whose traditional territory lies along the northern Georgia Strait. Due to the impacts of colonialism, especially the residential school system (TRC 2015), only 3% of the traditionally ʔayʔajuθəm-speaking population are now first-language speakers, while 10% are second-language learners (FPCC 2022). There

---

<sup>1</sup> Pentlatch and Kwak'wala are also ancestral languages of the K'ómoks Nation.

is currently an active and determined push for reclamation of language and culture among the four nations.

I consulted with five Elders from Tla'amin, Klahoose, and Homalco at different points during the background research for this paper but have worked especially closely with one speaker from Tla'amin in the later stages of this research.

### 3 Theoretical background

I follow much previous literature (Klein 1994, et seq.) in assuming that tense provides the evaluation time for a proposition, known as the *reference time* (RT). Tense relates this RT to a temporal anchor. In matrix clauses, the temporal anchor is typically the utterance time (UT). If the tense is present, the RT for the proposition is the same as the temporal anchor, while if the tense is past, the RT for the proposition precedes the temporal anchor.

- (1) a. The sky is blue. (RT = UT)  
 b. The sky was blue. (RT < UT)

Enç (1981, 1986) points out that the temporal interpretation of DPs is at least partly independent of the temporal interpretation of the clause they appear in. A classic example is given in (2):

- (2) Every fugitive is now in jail. (Enç 1986:409)

Although the sentence has present tense, the sentence is not about individuals who are fugitives now (or it would be contradictory), but rather about individuals who were fugitives before but are now in jail. To capture this, Enç proposes that each noun must have its own temporal argument or *NP evaluation time*. However, the temporal argument of a noun need not be syntactically represented as a nominal tense but may be rather supplied by the context (Enç 1986:422).

The question that this paper aims to address is whether the presence of the past marker on nouns in ʔayʔajuθəm should be taken as evidence that ʔayʔajuθəm nouns contain tense in their *syntax*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Burton's (1997) analysis of the past marker on nouns in Halkomelem as the morphological realization of nominal tense seems to imply a tense projection, although he does not explicitly claim a T projection in nominal environments.

4 ʔayʔajuθəm tense

Following Matthewson (2006) for St’át’imcets, I analyze ʔayʔajuθəm as having a null nonfuture tense (see Huijsmans 2022). Unmarked predicates may be interpreted as holding of a past or present time, as illustrated in (3), depending on the context (and subject to aspectual restrictions that will not concern us here; see Huijsmans 2022:30–34 for discussion).<sup>3</sup>

- (3) a. *Context: Talking about a cat in the room.*  
 kʷət gi            Patlik. ʔɛʔɛltən.  
 kʷə[n]-t=gi      Patlik. ʔi~ʔiltən.  
 see-CTR=DPRT Patrick PROG~eat  
 ‘Look at Patrick. He’s eating.’ [PRESENT] (vf | JF.2018/05/01)
- b. tʰətʰɣʷtəs                      tə cars                      skʷijol                      ʔi  
 tʰə~tʰɣʷ-t-as                      tə=car-s                      skʷijul                      ʔiy  
 PROG~wash-CTR-3ERG DET=car-3POSS this.morning CONJ  
 hɛwtəm      sçitʔos.  
 hiwt-əm      s=çəl-ʔu+s  
 ahead-MD NMLZ=rain-PST-3POSS  
 ‘He was washing his car this morning before it rained. [PAST]  
 (vf | PD.2019/04/10)

The future is obligatorily marked with the future clitic *səm* (Huijsmans and Mellesmoen 2021, Huijsmans 2022:28). In (4), for example, it is not possible to interpret the cooking event in the future of the UT without the future clitic.

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviations used in this paper follow Leipzig glossing conventions with some additions: ACT.INTR ‘active intransitive’, CLD ‘clausal demonstrative’, CLF.PRT ‘clefing particle’, CTR ‘control transitivizer’, DPRT ‘discourse particle’, EPEN ‘epenthetic segment’, INFER ‘inferential’, INT ‘intensifier’, MD ‘middle’, NCTR ‘non-control transitivizer’, RPT ‘reportative’, SBRD ‘subordinate’. The top line of each examples is an orthographic representation, and the second line is a roughly phonemic representation using NAPA. ‘vf’ stands for volunteered form, a form provided by the speaker, while ‘sf’ stands for suggested form, a form suggested to the speaker by the researcher.

- (4) *Context: I'm making a plan for dinner since someone gave me a fish.*

a. #č̣εχatč̣                      tə ʔɛnx<sup>w</sup> snanat.  
     č̣əǰ-at=č̣                      tə=ʔanx<sup>w</sup> s=nanat  
     cook-CTR=1SG.SBJ DET=fish NMLZ=evening  
     'I'll cook the fish tonight.'

b. č̣εχatt<sup>θ</sup>əḿ                      tə ʔɛnx<sup>w</sup> snanat.  
     č̣əǰ-at=t<sup>θ</sup>+əḿ                      tə=ʔanx<sup>w</sup> s=nanat  
     cook-CTR=1SG.SBJ+FUT DET=fish NMLZ=evening  
     'I'll cook the fish tonight.'

(Huijsmans and Mellesmoen 2021:106)

Formally, I analyze the null non-future tense as in (5) (Huijsmans 2022:28, originally from Matthewson 2006:680 for St'at'imcets). It is a pronominal tense, bearing an index *i* interpreted by the assignment function *g*. It is restricted to non-future times by a presupposition that no part of the RT interval  $g(i)$  follows the UT  $t_0$ .

- (5)  $\llbracket \text{NON-FUT}_i \rrbracket^{\text{g,c}} = g(i)$ ; defined only if no part of  $g(i)$  is after  $t_0$

As in English, the temporal interpretation of DPs in ʔayʔajuθəḿ is at least partly independent of the temporal interpretation of the clause as a whole. For instance, in (6), the RT for the clause is a past time when the speaker's father was a child. However, the referent of the DP was not yet a father at that past reference time. The evaluation time for  $t^\theta$  *man* 'my father' is rather the present.

- (6) *Context: I'm telling you about one of the neat things my dad did as a boy.*

hiyʔaʔmoł                      t<sup>θ</sup> man                      k<sup>w</sup> nənx<sup>w</sup>iʔəḿ  
  həy-ʔəḿ-uł                      t<sup>θ</sup>=man                      k<sup>w</sup>=nənx<sup>w</sup>iʔəḿ  
  make-ACT.INTR-PST 1SG.POSS=father DET=small.boat  
  sčuy<sup>o</sup>s.  
  s=čuy-ʔu+s  
  NMLZ=child-PST+3POSS

'My dad made a little boat when he was a kid.'

(sf | BW.2023/08/03)

## 5 Cross-category use of the ʔayʔajuθəm past marker

There is an optional past suffix *-oł*, which is the focus of this paper. It occurs on verbs, nouns, and adjectives, as shown in (7) (see Watanabe 2003:483–484 for a brief discussion of the use of *-oł* on nouns and verbs and Huijismans 2023 for arguments that nouns, verbs, and adjectives are syntactically and morphologically distinct categories). The adjective in (7c) is serving as the main predicate; predicative nouns and adjectives are not accompanied by a copula (see Huijismans 2023).

- (7) a. ḳʷɔnetołč                          šɛ xʷipomixʷtən                          sʃɛsoł  
ḳʷən-í-t-**ul**=č                          šə=xʷip-umixʷ-tən                          sʃasul  
see-STAT-CTR-PST=1SG.SBJ    DET=sweep-ground-INS    yesterday  
nɛʔ                  tə *shed*.  
niʔ                  tə=*shed*  
be.there    DET=*shed*  
‘I saw the broom yesterday in the shed.’  
[VERB] (vf | EP.2021/07/24)

- b. čkʷa ḳʷɔnoXʷ                          šɛ totχʷłaf  
čkʷa=ḳʷən-əXʷ                          šə=tutχʷłaf  
1SG.SBJ=CLD=see-NCTR    DET=necklace  
noʔos čɛ                          tʰ čičiyɛʔoł  
naʔ-ʔu+s=ča                          tʰ=č<ič>iya<ʔ>-**ul**  
OWN-PST+3POSS=INFER    1SG.POSS=grandmother<DIM>-PST  
χanatetoł ḳʷa  
χan-at-it-**ul**=ḳʷa  
give-CTR-SBRD.PASS=RPT  
ʔə šɛtʰ kʷukʷpaʔoł.  
ʔə=šə=tʰ=kʷu<kʷ>pa<ʔ>-**ul**  
OBL=DET=grandfather<DIM>-PST  
‘I found a necklace that must have belonged to my late grandmother that was given to her by my late grandfather.’ [NOUN]  
(vf | EP.2021/04/02)

- c. pəqoł                  tɛʔɛ ɟəsnaɪ.  
pəq-**ul**                  tiʔi ɟəsnaɪ  
white-PST    DEM shirt  
‘This shirt used to be white.’ [ADJECTIVE] (sf | EP.2023/06/29)

In clausal contexts, the past marker is used to unambiguously establish a past RT. It therefore frequently shows up on verbs at the beginning of a narrative or discourse about a past time. For instance, in the *Hawaii Trip* storyboard (Underhill and Cable 2015), Bill answers Mary’s question about his summer. The speaker uses *-ol* in (8b) when Bill begins to talk about his trip, but not on the subsequent predicates in (8c–d).

- (8) a. haʔačx<sup>w</sup>            taʔačiš *this summer?*  
           ha=a=čx<sup>w</sup>        taʔačiš *this summer*  
           go=Q=2SG.SBJ travel *this summer*  
           ‘Did you travel this summer?’
- b. hoʔoľč            k<sup>w</sup> *Hawaii.*  
           hu-ʔuľ=č        k<sup>w</sup>=*Hawaii*  
           go-PST=1SG.SBJ DET=*Hawaii*  
           ‘I went to Hawaii.’
- c. ʔowuľč            *plane eight* qəʃias        k<sup>w</sup>i.  
           ʔuwuľ=č        *plane eight* qəʃi=as     k<sup>w</sup>əy  
           get.on=1SG.SBJ *plane eight still*=3SBJV *early*  
           ‘I got on the plane at eight in the morning.’
- d. hoč            təs        k<sup>w</sup> *Hawaii*    k<sup>w</sup> nat.  
           hu=č        təs        k<sup>w</sup>=*Hawaii*    k<sup>w</sup>=nat  
           go=1SG.SBJ arrive DET=*Hawaii* DET=*night*  
           ‘I arrived in Hawaii at night.’ (vf | PD.2019/04/10)

In nominal environments, that is, when the past occurs within an NP that is sister to a D,<sup>4</sup> the past marker is typically used to indicate that the referent of the DP is dead, as in (7b), or destroyed, as in (9a); however, when the noun names a stage-level predicate, as in (9b), use of *-ol* can also indicate that the referent no longer has the nominal property, while still continuing to exist. On a possessed noun phrase, the interpretation can also be that the possession relation no longer holds (9c–d).

- (9) a. k<sup>w</sup>ak<sup>w</sup>a qətx<sup>w</sup>    k<sup>w</sup> ʔayeʔos.  
           k<sup>w</sup>a=k<sup>w</sup>a=qətx<sup>w</sup>    k<sup>w</sup>=ʔayaʔ-ʔu+s.  
           RPT=CLD=burn    DET=house-PST+3POSS  
           ‘His has house burnt down (I heard).’ (vf | EP.2019/06/29)

<sup>4</sup> The presence of D differentiates these environments from cases where the past marker occurs on nominal predicates, which are clausal environments.

- b. *Context: I talk to a former teacher at my highschool who is now retired. I never had him as a teacher myself. After, I tell my husband:*

kʷONOXʷolč                      šɛ tičɛhoɫ                      tuwa  
 kʷən-əxʷ-ul=č                      šə=tiča-h-ul                      tuwa  
 see-NCTR-PST=1SG.SBJ    DET=teacher-EPEN-PST    from

ʔətʰ kʷulawtxʷul.

ʔətʰ=kʷul-awtxʷ-ul

1SG.POSS=school-building-PST

‘I saw a former teacher from my school.’ (sf | EP.2021/11/20)

- c. *Context: Two friends are talking about a party this evening. They heard a mutual friend is coming. One of them realizes that their friend’s ex-wife may also come and says to her friend:*

čm sa ga                      qʷoləs                      šɛ saltuʔos?  
 čəm=sa+ga                      qʷəl=as                      šə=saltu-ʔu+s  
 what.is.with=FUT+DPRT    come=3SBJV    DET=wife-PST+3POSS

‘What if his ex-wife comes?’ (vf | EP.2021/05/21)

- d. *Context: When I get home from visiting my in-laws in Chile, I realize I left my sweater behind somewhere. It’s not at my husband’s parents’ place, so I don’t think I’ll find it again. I tell you:*

čkʷa xʷaʔaguxʷ                      šetʰ tekunukʷtoɫ.  
 č=kʷa=xʷaʔag-əxʷ                      šə=tʰ=takinukʷt-ul

1SG.SBJ=CLD=LOSE-NCTR    DET=1SG.POSS=sweater-PST

‘I lost my sweater.’ (vf | EP.2022/01/21)

When the past marker is attached to adjectives, the resulting interpretation is either that the adjective property has ceased to hold, as in (7c), or that the referent has ceased to exist (10B).

- (10) *Context: My husband and I have a multi-colored set of glasses. My favourite was the red one but it broke, and we threw it away. You’re putting glasses on the table before a meal and admire the remaining glasses in the set.*

A: hɛhɛw ʔajumišmot                      θ kʷoskʷasta.  
 hihiw ʔaj-umiš-mut                      θ=kʷəs~kʷaʔsta  
 really good-appearance-INT    2SG.POSS=PL~cup  
 ‘Your cups are really beautiful.’



B: hɛl ʃɛ tət<sup>0</sup>ɛmɔl ʔə k<sup>w</sup>ɛhɛt  
 hiɪ ʃə=tət<sup>0</sup>iɪm-ɯɪ ʔə=k<sup>w</sup>iɪh-ít  
 COP DET=red-PST CLF.PRT=increase-STAT  
 ʔisx<sup>w</sup>anɔɪ ʔi k<sup>w</sup>a yɪp.  
 ʔəy-sx<sup>w</sup>-an-ɯɪ ʔiy k<sup>w</sup>a=yəp̚  
 good-CAUS-1SG.ERG-PST CONJ CLD=get.broken  
 ‘The red one was my favourite but it broke.’  
 (sf | EP.2023/06/29)

The use of the past marker on stative predicates (including nouns, adjectives, and stative verbs) in both clausal and nominal environments triggers an inference that the predicate bearing the past marker does not hold of its subject at the UT. For instance, the most natural interpretation of (7c) is that the dress is not white at the UT, while the referent of (9a) is understood to no longer be a house (and therefore no longer to exist). Following Thomas (2014) (who in turn takes the term from Altshuler and Schwarzschild 2012), I label this the *cessation inference*.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full account of how this inference arises, I will sketch the analysis proposed in Thomas (2014). Briefly and informally, the idea is that a tensed proposition is interpreted in relation to contextually-relevant tensed alternatives: the assertion of the proposition is strengthened to mean that other contextually-relevant tensed alternatives do not hold (provided they are not entailed by the proposition). If a past tense proposition is asserted, the alternative present tense proposition is understood not to hold, so long as it is contextually relevant.<sup>5</sup>

The cessation inference does not arise when the context sets up a past topic time that does not include the present, as in (11). Here, the past topic time is the time of the speaker moving into the area. Note that (11) is a cleft and *hegus* ‘chief’ is the main predicate in the remnant clause.

<sup>5</sup> See Altshuler and Schwarzschild (2012) for an alternative account of how the cessation inference arises.

- (11) *Context: Peter has been chief for a long time. I remember that he was chief when I moved into the area many years ago, and he still is today. I'm telling someone newer to the area.*

hɛl ʔot Peter ʔə hegusɔl šɛt<sup>0</sup> ʔot q<sup>w</sup>ol̩  
 hiɫ=ʔut Peter ʔə=higus-**ul** šə=t<sup>0</sup>=ʔut q<sup>w</sup>əl̩  
 COP=EXCL Peter CLF.PRT=chief-PST DET=1SG.POSS=at.first come  
 tayqitoɫ ʔə tɛʔɛ.  
 tayq-iyt-**ul** ʔə=tiʔi  
 MOVE-PRF-PST OBL=DEM  
 ‘Peter was chief when I first moved here.’ (vf | EP.2023/07/07)

When the past suffix is used in nominal environments, however, cessation of the nominal property is entailed. The past suffix is infelicitous on *tičɛ* ‘teacher’ in (12a) and *laplEt* ‘priest’ in (12b) because in each case, the nominal predicate still holds of the DP’s referent.

- (12) a. *Context: There’s a teacher that’s been at the school as long as we can remember, and he still hasn’t retired.*

hɛhɛw χ<sup>w</sup>oχ<sup>w</sup>mot ʔəl̩ nišəs šɛn̩  
 hihiw ʃ<sup>w</sup>uʃ<sup>w</sup>-mut ʔəl̩=niš=as šan̩  
 really long-INT COMP=be.here=3SBJV DEM  
 tičɛh(#**ol**) ʔi qəʃi ʔot niš.  
 tiča-h-(#**ul**) ʔiy qəʃi=ʔut niš  
 teacher-EPEN-(#PST) CONJ still=EXCL be.here  
 ‘That teacher has been here a long time, and he’s still (teaching) here.’ (sf | EP.2023/07/07)

- b. *Context: I see a news article about a parish priest in a small town where I used to live.*

nɛʔol̩ tañ laplɛt(#**ol**) ʔək<sup>w</sup> Duncan  
 niʔ-**ul** tañ laplit-(#**ul**) ʔə=k<sup>w</sup>=Duncan  
 be.there-PST DEM priest-(#PST) OBL=DET=Duncan  
 šɛt<sup>0</sup> nɛʔol̩ χ<sup>w</sup>oχ<sup>w</sup>motol̩. hɛhɛw  
 šə=t<sup>0</sup>=niʔ-**ul** ʃ<sup>w</sup>uʃ<sup>w</sup>-mut-**ul**. hihiw  
 DET=1SG.POSS=be.there-PST long.time-INT-PST really  
 χ<sup>w</sup>oχ<sup>w</sup>motol̩ ʔəl̩ nɛʔəs.  
 ʃ<sup>w</sup>uʃ<sup>w</sup>-mut-**ul** ʔəl̩=niʔ=as.  
 long.time-PST COMP=be.there=3SBJV  
 ‘That priest was in Duncan when I lived there long ago. He has been there a long time.’ (sf | EP.2023/08/31)

While this could be taken to indicate that the past marker in nominal environments is a distinct morpheme from the past marker in clausal environments, I do not pursue this approach. Tonhauser (2006, 2007) and Thomas (2012, 2014) observe a similar asymmetry for the past morpheme in Paraguayan Guaraní and Mbyá, but Thomas argues that this asymmetry arises due to different pragmatic factors in the interpretation of clauses and DPs, rather than to semantically distinct but homophonous past morphemes (one applying in nominalized clausal environments and one to nouns).

Briefly, Thomas analyzes the past marker on a noun as placing the RT for the nominal property in the past of the NP evaluation time. So, for instance, in (9b), the RT for *tičɛ* ‘teacher’ is placed in the past of the evaluation time for the NP *tičɛhoł* ‘former teacher’, which in this case is the same as the RT of the clause: the time of the seeing event.

Thomas proposes that the NP evaluation time is always relevant to the interpretation of the NP (i.e., it is always topical), and therefore the past marker on a noun always gives rise to the cessation inference: it is understood that the nominal property cannot be claimed to hold at the NP evaluation time.<sup>6</sup> In (9b), this means that the referent of the DP *šɛ tičɛhoł* ‘a former teacher’ is understood not to be a teacher any longer at the NP evaluation time, the time of the seeing event.

Given the availability of a plausible pragmatic account, I believe a unified analysis of the past tense marker in nominal and clausal environments is preferable. At the very least, the presence of the same past marker applying across different environments with parallel interpretive differences in unrelated languages suggests that there should be a more general explanation than accidental homophony of nominal and clausal temporal markers.

If we adopt Thomas’s account, the different interpretations that arise when the past occurs in nominal environments can be understood in terms of the obligatory cessation inference. The following discussion follows Burton (1997) very closely, who also derives the various readings in terms of a cessation inference (though he does not use this term).

When the past occurs on an individual-level nominal predicate in a DP, the individual-level predicate is interpreted as ceasing to hold of the referent of the DP by the NP evaluation time. The resulting interpretation

<sup>6</sup> Cable (2017) also shows that cessation inferences that arise for clausal uses of the optional past tense morpheme in Tlingit should be derived pragmatically, though they are often not cancellable.

is that the referent of the DP has ceased to exist by the time the NP is evaluated, as in (9a), since this is the only plausible way for the permanent property (being a house) to cease to hold of the referent (see also (7) and (10)).

When the past occurs on a stage-level noun like an occupation, the interpretation is that this temporary property no longer holds of the referent at the NP evaluation time. In this case, the meaning is compatible with the individual leaving the occupation, as for the retired teacher in (9b).

Finally, when the past occurs on a possessed noun, the RT for the possession relation and nominal property are placed in the past of the NP evaluation time. Following Burton (1997), the possession relation can be represented as a predicate R which is conjoined with the nominal predicate and has a possessum, possessor, and time argument: ...  $N(x,t) \wedge R(x, \text{possessor}, t)$ ...<sup>7</sup> It is the conjoined possession relation and nominal property that ceases to hold by the NP evaluation time. The cessation inference is met so long as one or both of the conjuncts cease to hold, resulting in both interpretations where the possession relation no longer holds and where the entity has ceased to exist, depending on context and plausibility.

If it is the possession relation that ceases to hold, the interpretation may be that the possession has been lost, as for the sweater in (9c), sold, or stolen. In contrast, since my grandparents will always stand in a grandparent relation to me, the past marker on *t<sup>θ</sup> čičiyε?* ‘my grandmother’ and *t<sup>θ</sup> k<sup>w</sup>uk<sup>w</sup>pa?* ‘my grandfather’ in (7b) results in the interpretation that these individuals are deceased.

## 6 The past marker *-o!* is not a tense

So far, the discussion of *-o!* leaves it plausible that it is a canonical past tense, placing the RT for the (verbal, nominal, or adjectival) predicate preceding a temporal anchor, and giving rise to cessation inferences in pragmatically determined contexts. However, there is one major difference between *-o!* and a morpheme that specifically occupies T: *-o!* does not have a fixed syntactic position and does not apply at a fixed point in the semantic derivation.

This is seen in complex nominal predicates (CNPs). CNPs consist

---

<sup>7</sup> Burton (1997) has a separate possession time and nominal RT but I do without an extra possession RT here.

of a head noun preceded by one or more modifiers which together form the main predicate of the clause. The past marker can be found attaching both to an adjectival modifier and the main predicate, but the position of the past marker affects the interpretation.

When the adjectival property no longer holds, *-ot* attaches to the adjective. For instance, in (13a) and (14a), *-ot* attaches to the adjective *titolmot* ‘very small’. Because the lake and house still exist, *-ot* cannot felicitously attach to the head noun: (13b) and (14b) are infelicitous.<sup>8</sup>

(13) *Context: Daniel is pointing on a map to a little pond that used to be a big lake but was drained a while back for farmland.*

- a. **tihmotot** θayɛt taŋ sɣ<sup>w</sup>ox<sup>w</sup>ot ʔi  
 tih-mut-**ut** θayal tin sɣ<sup>w</sup>ux<sup>w</sup>-ut ʔiy  
 big-INT-PST lake DEM long.time-PST CONJ  
 gaʔqoθetəm.  
 gəq-uθi[n]-t-əm  
 open-mouth-CTR-PASS

‘This used to be a big lake a long time ago but they drained it.’

- b. #tihmot θayɛt**ot** taŋ sɣ<sup>w</sup>ox<sup>w</sup>ot ʔi  
 tih-mut θayal-**ut** tin sɣ<sup>w</sup>ux<sup>w</sup>-ut ʔiy  
 big-INT lake-PST DEM long.time-PST CONJ  
 gaʔqoθetəm.  
 gəq-uθi[n]-t-əm  
 open-mouth-CTR-PASS

‘This used to be a big lake a long time ago but they drained it.’

(sf | EP.2023/07/23)

(14) *Context: We’re looking at my neighbour’s house that used to be small but has had a lot of additions and renovations and is now quite big. I tell you:*

- a. **titolmotot** ʔaʔyeʔ taŋ ʔi paʂetəm.  
 titul-mut-**ut** ʔa<ʔ>yɛʔ taŋ ʔiy paʂ-at-əm  
 small-INT-PST house<DIM> DEM CONJ add.on-CTR-PASS

‘That used to be a small house, but they’ve added onto it.’

<sup>8</sup> The fact that *-ot* is felicitous only on the adjective and not on the diminutive noun in (14) suggests that the contribution of the diminutive reduplication is not at-issue.

- b. #titolmot ʔaʔyeʔol tañ ʔi ʔašetəm.  
 titul<sup>1</sup>-mut ʔa<ʔ>yεʔ-**ul** tañ ʔiy ʔaş-at-əm  
 small-INT house<DIM>-PST DEM CONJ add.ON-CTR-PASS  
 ‘That used to be a small house, but they’ve added onto it.’  
 (sf | EP.2023/07/16)

When the described entity no longer exists (and therefore both the nominal and adjectival properties no longer hold of it), the past marker can appear on either the adjective or the noun (15)–(17). My consultant sometimes preferred *-ol* on the adjective, but also accepted placement on the noun, unlike for (13)–(14); this preference is indicated with a question mark for (15b) and (16b).

(15) *Context: I point out an empty building in town to Daniel and Gloria:*

- a. ʔimot**ol** ʔeltənawtx<sup>w</sup> tita sɣ<sup>w</sup>oɣ<sup>w</sup>ol.  
 ʔəy-mut-**ul** ʔiltən-awtx<sup>w</sup> təy<sup>ta</sup> sɣ<sup>w</sup>uɣ<sup>w</sup>-**ul**  
 good-INT-PST eat-building DEM long.time-PST  
 ‘That used to be a good restaurant a long time ago.’
- b. ?ʔimot ʔeltənawtx<sup>w</sup>**ol** tita sɣ<sup>w</sup>oɣ<sup>w</sup>ol.  
 ʔəy-mut ʔiltən-awtx<sup>w</sup>-**ul** təy<sup>ta</sup> sɣ<sup>w</sup>uɣ<sup>w</sup>  
 good-INT eat-building-PST DEM long.time-PST  
 ‘That used to be a good restaurant a long time ago.’  
 (sf | EP.2023/07/23)

(16) *Context: I’m showing you my yard and point out a stump.*

- a. hɛhew tihmot**ol** jεʔje tiʔta ʔi jεqatəm.  
 hihiw tih-mut-**ul** jaʔja təy<sup>ta</sup> ʔiy jaq-at-əm  
 really big-INT-PST tree DEM CONJ fall-CTR-PASS  
 ‘That used to be a big tree, but it’s been felled.’
- b. ?hɛhew tihmot jεʔjeh**ol** tiʔta ʔi jεqatəm.  
 hihiw tih-mut jaʔja-h-**ul** təy<sup>ta</sup> ʔiy jaq-at-əm  
 really big-INT tree-EPEN-PST DEM CONJ fall-CTR-PASS  
 ‘That used to be a big tree, but it’s been felled.’  
 (sf | EP.2023/07/23)

(17) *Context: Peter was a good leader. He's since passed on.*

a. ʔimotɔɫ ʔəms heɡus Pita.  
 ʔəy-mut-**uɫ** ʔəms=higus Pita  
 good-INT 1PL.POSS=chief-PST Peter  
 ‘Peter was a good former chief.’

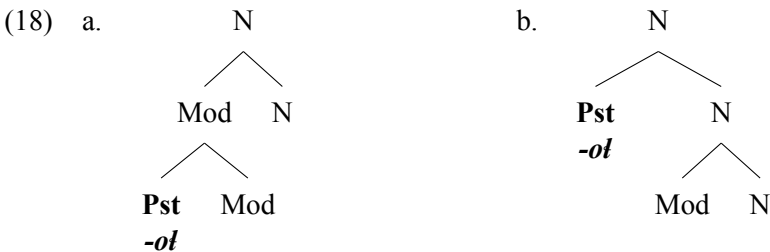
b. ʔimot ʔəms heɡusɔɫ Pita.  
 ʔəy-mut ʔəms=higus-**uɫ** Pita  
 good-INT 1PL.POSS=chief-PST Peter  
 ‘Peter was a good former chief.’

(sf | EP.2023/07/19)

The final possibility where property of the head noun no longer holds of the subject, but the modifier property does, still needs to be investigated. The prediction is that the past marker will only be able to occur on the head noun in these cases.

This evidence from CNPs shows that the past marker can attach at different points syntactically, corresponding to differences in interpretation. To account for these facts, I propose that the past marker does not occupy T, and as such, does not constitute a true tense marker. Instead, following Matthewson (2005), I propose that the past marker is a temporal modifier.

When the modifier of a noun ceases to hold, as in (13)–(14), I propose that the past marker attaches directly to the modifier (18a). When both the nominal and modifier properties cease to hold, as in (15)–(17), I propose that the past marker attaches to the whole complex (18b).



Since modifiers typically precede the head of the phrase in ʔayʔajuθəɲ, I represent the past marker on a leftward branch. I assume that its suffixal specification causes it to attach to the head post-syntactically in the morphology (see Huijsmans 2022:99–109). When it is merged with a phrase, as in (19c), I suggest that it may either attach to the head noun or

to the closer preceding modifier; I leave a full account of how these two possible placements are derived to future work.

## 7 Semantic analysis

The common factor to the use of *-ot* across environments is that it restricts the RT for the verbal, nominal, or adjectival predicate to the past of a temporal anchor. While the temporal anchor in matrix clauses is typically the UT, the temporal anchor in nominal environments is the NP evaluation time.

I propose that the past marker contributes a presupposition that the RT  $t$  for a predicate  $P$  precedes the contextually provided temporal anchor  $t_c$ .<sup>9</sup> In clausal contexts, the temporal argument will be saturated by the null non-future tense. In nominal contexts, I assume that the temporal argument is supplied by a contextually provided NP evaluation time.

$$(19) \quad \llbracket -ot \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda P.\lambda x.\lambda t : t < t_c.[P(x)(t)]$$

Crucially, since the past marker does not occupy T, its presence modifying NPs does not shed light on whether the NP evaluation time is syntactically represented. The past marker does not provide evidence for nominal tense.

This analysis predicts *-ot* to be able to combine with CNPs as a whole or their component parts. However, this analysis also raises questions, since the components of a CNP combine to take a single reference time supplied by T. Why then does it matter where *-ot* attaches? I sketch only a preliminary account here. A more complete analysis will require an account of how the component parts of the CNP combine semantically and is left for future research.

When the past attaches to the modifier in (13)–(14), it adds a presupposition that the RT for the modifier is in the past of the UT, triggering a cessation inference since the current states of the lake and house are salient and relevant. Since the RT for the complex predicate is ultimately saturated by the null non-future tense, the clause's RT ends up restricted to the past (consistent with the temporal adverb *sχ<sup>w</sup>oχ<sup>w</sup>ot* 'a long time ago' in (13)). *-ot* is infelicitous on *θay<sup>l</sup>et* 'lake' and *ʔaʔyeʔ* 'house (diminutive)'

<sup>9</sup> The fact that different noun phrases within a clause could potentially have different temporal anchors means that having the temporal anchor provided as a parameter of interpretation is an oversimplification. However, providing a full account of the temporal interpretation of DPs is beyond the scope of this paper.



because triggering the presupposition in this position would signal that the lake property and house property required a past RT, contrary to fact.

For examples like (15)–(17), both the adjectival and nominal property have ceased to hold of the referent (since the restaurant no longer exists and chief has passed). For these cases, I have proposed that the past marker attaches to the whole CNP, meaning that it contributes a presupposition that the RT for the whole CNP is in the past. The cessation inference is then that the referent of the subject DP can no longer be described by the complex predicate.

## 8 Discussion

In this short paper, I have argued that the past marker in ʔayʔajuθəm is not a true tense, but rather a temporal modifier that can attach at different points within a clause. In terms of the debate regarding nominal tense in Salish languages, this paper supports the position taken by Matthewson (2005) where past markers in nominal contexts are modifiers rather than true past tenses or realizations of an interpretable tense feature (cf. Burton 1997; Wiltschko 2003). The past marker in ʔayʔajuθəm therefore does not provide evidence for a T projection among the functional projections of a noun phrase.

Though the past marker does not provide evidence for a tense projection in nominal environments, it does provide further evidence that the semantics of noun phrases involves reference to time. How the relevant temporal arguments are ultimately supplied is a matter for future research.

In closing, I would like to point to a welcome consequence of the current analysis. Besides accounting for why the past marker has variable placement, this proposal has the advantage of offering an explanation for why the past marker is not obligatory when the RT is past. Though the past marker contributes a presupposition that the RT precedes the UT, as a temporal modifier, it is not in competition with the null non-future tense. Therefore, even though it carries more presuppositional content than the null non-future tense, Maximize Presupposition does not apply (Heim 1991; Bochnak 2016) and the past marker is correctly predicted to be optional.

**References**

- Altshuler, D. and Schwarzschild, R. (2012). Moment of change, cessation implicatures and simultaneous readings. In Homer, V., Chemla, E., and Winterstein, G., editors, *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 17*, pages 45–62.
- Bochnak, M. (2016). Past time reference in a language with optional tense. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 39:247–294.
- Burton, S. (1997). Past tense on nouns as death, destruction and loss. In Kusumoto, K., editor, *Proceedings of NELS 27*, pages 65–77, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. GLSA.
- Cable, S. (2017). The implicatures of optional past tense in Tlingit and the implications for ‘discontinuous past’. *Natural language and linguistic theory*, 35:635–681.
- Enç, M. (1981). *Tense without scope: An analysis of nouns as indexicals*. PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin.
- Enç, M. (1986). Towards a referential analysis of temporal expressions. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 9:405–426.
- First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) (2022). Report on the status of B.C. First Nations languages. Retrieved from <https://fpcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/FPCC-LanguageReport-23.02.14-FINAL.pdf>.
- Heim, I. (1991). Artikel und Definitheit. In von Stechow, A. and Wunderlich, D., editors, *Semantics: An international handbook of contemporary research*, pages 487–535. De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Huijismans, M. (2022). *Second-position clitics, from morphosyntax to semantics: The ʔayʔajuθəm (Comox-Sliammon) perspective*. PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Huijismans, M. (2023). Lexical categories in ʔayʔajuθəm. In *Proceedings of the 58th International Conference on Salish and Neighbouring Languages*, Vancouver. UBCWPL.
- Huijismans, M. and Mellesmoen, G. (2021). An overview of control and non-control in ʔayʔajuθəm (Comox-Sliammon). In Reisinger, D., Green, H., Griffin, L., Huijismans, M., Mellesmoen, G., and Trotter, B., editors, *Proceedings of the 56th International Conference*

- on *Salish and Neighbouring Languages*, pages 84–110, Vancouver. UBCWPL.
- Klein, W. (1994). *Time in language*. Routledge, London.
- Matthewson, L. (2005). On the absence of tense on determiners. *Lingua*, 115:1697–1735.
- Matthewson, L. (2006). Temporal semantics in a superficially tenseless language. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 29:673–713.
- Thomas, G. (2012). *Temporal implicatures*. PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Thomas, G. (2014). Nominal tense and temporal implicatures: evidence from Mbyá. *Natural Language Semantics*, 22:357–412.
- Tonhauser, J. (2006). *The temporal semantics of noun phrases: evidence from Guaraní*. PhD thesis, Stanford University.
- Tonhauser, J. (2007). Nominal tense? the meaning of guaraní nominal temporal markers. *Language*, 83:831–869.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015). Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future. Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Underhill, R. and Cable, S. (2015). Hawaii trip. *Totem Field Storyboards*. Retrieved from <http://www.totemfieldstoryboards.org>.
- Watanabe, H. (2003). *A morphological description of Sliammon, Mainland Comox Salish, with a sketch of syntax*. ELPR Publications Series AZ-040. Osaka Gakuin University, Osaka.
- Wiltschko, M. (2003). On the interpretability of tense on D and its consequences for case theory. *Lingua*, 113:659–696.

