

## Variable Exponence of Aspect in Tsuut'ina Verbs

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Sub-discipline: Morphology

(Preference: 15-minute talk)

The Tsuut'ina language exhibits complex verbal morphology that in many ways challenges linguistic analysis. One example is a pattern of variable exponence of aspect in which prefixes vary in form depending on the person of the subject.

(1) *nàdīyīshát*

*nà-di-yi-s-Ø-yá-l*

ADV-TH-**PROG**-1.SG-CLASS-arrive-PROG

‘I am/was arriving’

*nàdáyát*

*nà-di-a-Ø-Ø-yá-l*

ADV-TH-**PROG**-3.SG-CLASS-arrive-PROG

‘she is/was arriving’

(Starlight & Donovan: 27)

In (1), progressive aspect is expressed by the prefix *yi-* in non-3<sup>rd</sup> person forms, but by *a-* in 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms. This pattern of variable exponence represents a challenge to analyses premised upon the notion of uniformity of exponence within a given paradigm. One such analysis (Cook 1984) seeks to preserve the underlying uniformity of the paradigm by treating variable exponence as phonological allomorphy. More recent analyses argue that the morphophonological rules required for such an analysis are overly complex and constitute an unreasonable degree of abstraction. Such analyses (e.g., McDonough 2000; Arppe et al. 2017) aim to reduce the level of abstraction by treating the verbal prefix complex as an unanalyzable “chunk”, thereby obviating the need for most morphophonological alternation. While Cook’s proposed analysis of variable exponence as phonological allomorphy lacks reasonable support in the form of well-motivated phonological processes, resulting in excessive abstraction, the chunking approaches avoid abstraction to an excessive degree and in so doing fail to capture reasonable generalizations. I argue for an alternative analysis, as middle ground, drawing on theoretical (e.g., Casali 1997, Hanson 2015) psycholinguistic (Rice, Libben & Derwing 2002) and acquisition (Courteny & Saville-Troike 2002) evidence in the literature.

**Keywords:** Dene, Tsuut'ina, morphology, inflection, variable exponence

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