

Guide to “Two Optional Past “Tenses” in Kanien’kéha”

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OPTIONAL PAST TENSE, illustrated for Kanien’kéha in (1)¹, has been identified in several languages with the following properties:

- Past time reference is attainable with and without the past tense morpheme
- Marked past tense forms often come with **an additional discontinuity or cessation meaning**

(1) **Tense suffixes: Former Past *-(h)kwe’* and Remote Past *-hne’***

- a. Ohna’kénhaton shà:kken’ wató:ratskwe’
Ohna’kénhaton sh-a’-k-ken’ w-atorat-s-kwe’
last.time COIN-FACT-ISGA-see-PUNC FZ.A-hunt-HAB-FOR.PAST
‘When I saw her last, she was hunting.’
⇒ She is not currently hunting.
- b. Sue rotiniakòn:ne’.
Sue roti-niak-on-hne
Sue M.DU.P-marry-STAT-REM.PAST
‘He was married to Sue.’
⇒ They are no longer married.

These two suffixes are usually grouped together under the label “Past Tense”

- The Former Past is a past tense in the true sense
- The Remote Past is more like a derivational suffix, something like a “cessative”

Why this matters for linguistics?

- see debate about DISCONTINUOUS PAST (p. 2) and about how “cessation” should be defined (§5).

Why this matters for Kanien’kéha?

- This may help us make better predictions about when we can use the Remote Past *-hne’*?

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1 Major points

1.1 Meaning difference between Former and Remote Past

Summary

- FORMER PAST *-(h)kwe'* has a cessation implicature (the event is understood to end, but not necessarily)
- REMOTE PAST *-hne'* has a cessation entailment (the event is understood to end, necessarily)

1.2 Hypothesis about distribution of Remote Past

HYPOTHESIS: Remote Past forms are restricted to those predicates whose event/state descriptions **do not have an endpoint**.

- A note: this does not mean that these events/states have no end *in the real world*. What this means is that **grammatical usage of the verb does not seem to impose any requirements regarding the endpoint** – it is irrelevant to the grammar (just for these verbs).

From this, **speakers are able to reason and infer the necessary information** about whether the event/state are still on-going at the time of speaking, or the Utterance Time.

Verbs that fall into this class (see §4.1)

- number predicates, like *áhsen níkónti* 'be three'
- temperature predicates, like *íowísto* 'it is cold'
- notionally permanent or difficult-to-change properties, like *-ation* 'be lost' or *-niakon* 'be married'

1.3 How the account works

- The verbs that use Remote Past *-hne'* are those which do not have an endpoint.
- Precisely *because they don't have an endpoint*, they are **necessarily present referring**
- The Remote Past adds ① an endpoint and ② the requirement that it has been reached; it is *not* Tense
- Because of requirement ②, the remote past is **necessarily past referring** (thus deriving the cessation entailment without Tense)

Summary:

- Former Past is past tense
- Remote Past is not a past tense, but rather a “cessative” operator.
- The proposed category of “Discontinuous Past” does not find support in Kanien'kéha