

# SURPRISE IN KANIEN'KÉHA! Roti'nikonhrowá:nens!

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## 1 Introduction!

- Languages possess a number of ways to express surprise.

- (1)
- |    |                        |                    |
|----|------------------------|--------------------|
| a. | Wow!                   | (Lexical item)     |
| b. | He swims fast!         | (Prosody)          |
| c. | Boy does he swim fast! | (Grammatical form) |

- While expressing surprise is a necessary and natural part of speaking a language, grammars and textbooks rarely make much reference to it.

- (2) Example from [Michelson et al. 2024](#)

tó: how much? how many? For example:

**Tó: ní:kón?** How many? **Tó: nihá:ti?**

How many (persons)? **Tó: ní:wa'?** How

big? **Tó: nikanó:ron?** How much does it

cost? **Tó: niahà:tkene'?** How much did it

go for? How much did it come to?

**Tó: na'tesohseriià:kón?** How old are

you?

*Also* an exclamative expression, as in

(taking to oneself) “let me see!”

- Work on the expression of surprise is also relatively under-documented in theoretical linguistics, particularly in non-European languages.

### My goals

1. catalog all different ways of expressing surprise in Kanien'kéha
2. investigate a source for grammatical exclamativity in Kanien'kéha

## 2 Different ways to express surprise!

- **Interjections** (little words like English *wow!*)

- (3) Kenh!  
right here  
'Really!'

- (4) Tó:!  
how  
'Let's see here!' or 'My!'

- |                  |             |
|------------------|-------------|
| (5) a. Há:ke(h)! | d. Niò:ts!  |
| b. Á:ke(h)!      | e. Wá: só:! |
| c. Nió:h!        | f. Thió:!   |

→ It doesn't seem like any of these are uniquely tied to surprise, but instead to general emotion of the speaker.

• **Expressive lexical items** (swear words like English *damn!*)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (6) Ótkon!<br>o-tkon<br>N.P-devil<br>'Damn!'          | (8) Otkon'seráksen!<br>o-tkon-'ser-aksen<br>N.P-devil-NMLZ-be.bad<br>'Bad devil!'    |
| (7) Ótsta!<br>o-tst-a<br>N.P-fish.scale-NS<br>'Shit!' | (9) Ateneniáhrhon!<br>ate-neni-a-hrho-n<br>SRFL-stone-JR-coat-STAT<br>'Stone giant!' |
| (10) Keniátshia thia'karihwakénnia'te'!               |  |

→ Again, it doesn't seem like any of these are uniquely tied to surprise, but instead to general emotion of the speaker.

• **Exclamations** (full sentences like English *It's crazy that he did that!*)

- (11) Context: you meet your friend's new dog for the first time and he's one of those hairless, little dogs with an underbite and a tongue that never stays in his mouth.
- Oh tsi** rahétken.  
oh tsi ra-hetken  
what that MsgA-be.ugly.STAT  
'Wow, he's ugly!'

→ In Kanien'kéha, these constructions seem flexible in which ingredients they use.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (12) a. Rahétken!   | d. Oh tsi rahétken!  |
| b. Oh rahétken!   | e. Á:ke tsi rahétken!  |
| c. Tsi rahétken!  | f. Á:ke tsi nihahétken!  |
| (13) <b>Oneshonrón:on</b> tsi rahétken.<br>o-neshon-hronon tsi ra-hetken<br>N.P-hell-resident that MsgA-be.ugly.STAT<br>'Oh my god, he's ugly!' | (14) Oh tsi <b>rawha'kt</b> serahétken!<br>oh tsi ra-wha'k-tsera-hetken<br>what that MsgA-fuck-NLMZ-be.ugly.STAT<br>'Wow, he is fucking ugly!' |

• There is also a ton of speaker/community variation. Akwiratékha' said he doesn't really hear (12d) or (12e) in Kahnawà:ke. Speakers in the same community might prefer one form over another.

• **Exclamatives** (grammatically unique forms like English *How tall John is!*)

- (15) Nihahnén:ies!  
ni-ra-hnenies  
PART-MsgA-be.tall  
'How tall he is!'

→ These forms can also appear with the surprise words like *oh* and *tsi* and even *oneshonrón:on* to amp up the emotions.<sup>1</sup>

- (16) Oh tsi na'tehskahrowá:nen's!  
oh tsi ni-a'te-hs-kahro-wanen-'s  
what that PART-DEP-2sgA-eye-be.big-BEN  
'What big eyes you have!'
- (17) Oneshonrón:on tsi nihahétken.  
o-neshon-hronon tsi ni-ra-hetken  
N.P-hell-resident that PART-MsgA-be.ugly.STAT  
'Oh my god is he ugly!'

### 3 Defining exclamativity!

- Almost any utterance can be *exclaimed*, or expressed in a way that shows the speaker's surprise.

- (18) a. Paul is cool.  
b. Paul is cool!!!!

→ Exclamation: any utterance produced to communicate the speaker's surprise, typically expressed through stress/intonation (the exclamation mark below denotes an exclaiming intonation).

- However, only some languages have a specific syntactic structure (i.e. grammatical form) that only gives rise to exclamatory readings.
  - Sadock and Zwicky 1985: declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives are universal but exclamatives are not).
- Exclamatives: exclamations which take a special syntactic form associated with surprise.

- (19) a. What bananas Mary eats! (Wh-exclamative)  
b. The bananas Mary eats! (Nominal exclamative)  
c. Does Mary eat bananas! (Inversion exclamative)

- Exclamatives are distinguished by two main things:

1. Exclamative form: they possess a special form that can only be used in surprising contexts.

- (20) Context: The type and amount of bananas Mary eats is normal in every way.
  - a. Mary eats bananas! (Exclamation)
  - b. #Boy does Mary eat bananas! (Exclamative)

2. Exclamative force: they share a set of semantic properties that have been documented in exclamatives across lots of different languages.

★ Let's see how these characteristics play out in Kanien'kéha!

### 4 Exclamative form!

- Kanien'kéha has some constructions that seem like they can only be used when the speaker is surprised.

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<sup>1</sup>It's interesting that *oh* can't be used alone but the other expressive words can.

- (21) a. Tehsenawiré:son's.  
 te-hs-nawir-es-on-'s  
 DUP-2sgA-eye-be.big-STAT-BEN  
 'You have long teeth.'  
 Cannot mean: 'What long teeth you have!'
- b. Oh tsi na'tehsenawiré:son's.  
 n-a'te-hs-nawir-es-on-'s  
 PART-DUP-2sgA-eye-be.big-STAT-BEN  
 'What long teeth you have!'  
 Cannot mean: 'You have long teeth.'

• Kanien'kéha exclamatives can include several pieces:

- *oh*: wh-word for 'what/which'
- *tsi*: complementizer
- *ni* -: partitive prefix
- a verbal complex

• Which pieces are contributing to exclamation?

- You can have *oh* without *tsi* or *ni*.

(22) Oh rahétken!

- But you can also swap out *oh* for other words.

(23) Oh / oneshonrón:on / nió:h / há:keh tsi rahétken!

- You can't have *tsi* without *oh* or *ni*.

(24) #Tsi rahétken!

- You can have *ni* without *oh* or *tsi*.

(25) Nihahétken!

→ Only the partitive *ni* can derive an exclamative reading all by itself.

⇒ **Proposal:** PART + verb = exclamative!

- (26) a. Rahnén:ies!  
 ra-hnenies  
 MsgA-be.tall  
 'He is tall!' (Exclamation)
- b. Oh tsi nihahnén:ies!  
 oh tsi ni-ra-hnenies  
 what that PART-MsgA-be.tall  
 'How very tall he is!' (Exclamative)

**Quick aside: EMPH tsi**

- Though I'm saying that only the main clause partitive construction is the *true* exclamative form, this doesn't mean that the *oh tsi* part isn't contributing to the expression of surprise.
- First, the pre-*tsi* element can change or be left off, suggesting that it's not an essential part of the construction.
- Second, these pre-*tsi* elements do not uniquely express surprise. Many are more commonly translated as 'Jeez' or 'Oh my' and can appear in non-exclamatory contexts (e.g. *oh tsi* I'm mad!).
- **Proposal:** these elements are interjections of general expressivity/emotion, used to express the level of the speaker's emotion towards the proposition. We might gloss them as EMPH.
- These types of embedding emphatics can be found in other languages such as Québec French.

(27) a. Wow que c'est cool! b. Ouf qu'il a oublié mon nom.  
 wow that it's cool ugh that.he PST forgot my nam  
 'This is amazingly cool!' I'm annoyed that he forgot my name.'

- This is a different type of encoding of emotion than exclamatives (not limited to surprise, not a truly unique grammatical form) so I'm going to set this construction aside for now!

- What makes the *ni* + verb constructions interesting? In all other main clause contexts, the partitive must co-occur with an element outside of the verb that contributes some type of meaning to the verb.

(28) a. **áhsen** ni-ka-nónhs-a-ke (Counting; Martin 2023, 23)  
 three PART-N.A-house-JR-be.certain.amount  
 '(there are) three houses'

b. **Ken'** ni-wa-nónh-a' (Measuring; Martin 2023, 25)  
 this PART-N.A-house-measure  
 'The house is this small.'

c. **Tó** ni-h-á:t-i? (Enumerative question; Bonvillain 1973, 177)  
 how.many PART-MplA-SRFL-number  
 'How many are they?'

- In all of these cases, the item in bold, which I will refer to as the 'referential element' is obligatory and the presence of each referential element inversely requires the presence of the partitive. This obligatory co-occurrence is common with pre-pronominal prefixes in Kanien'kéha.

(29) a. **Iah** tekatá:wens. (Negating)  
 iah te-k-atawen-s  
**no** NEG-1sgA-swim-HAB  
 'I don't swim.'

b. **Á:re'** sá:keke'. (Repeating)  
 are' sa-k-ek-'  
 again REP.FACT-1sgA-eat-PUNC  
 'I ate it again.'

c. **Tho** ia'katá:wen'. (Directions/locations)  
 Tho i-wa'-k-atawen-'  
**there** TRANS-FACT-1sgA-swim-PUNC  
 'I swam there.'

⇒ **Conclusion:** In Kanien'kéha, exclamatives are unique syntactic constructions distinguished by two things:

- 1. the presence of a partitive prefix without a referential element, and
  - 2. the use of such a construction as a matrix clause
- This configuration gives rise to exclamative semantics in which the speaker's surprise at the **degree** of some property related to an event is obligatorily exclaimed.

## 5 Exclamative force!

- Exclamatives are said to share a set of semantic properties cross-linguistically which distinguish them from other clause types.
- Here are some common tests used to identify exclamatives.

(30) Semantic criteria so far

Test	Expected	Result
Q/A	✗	✗
Evaluativity	✓	✓
Factivity	✓	?
Degree Restriction	✓	✓

- So far, Kanien'kéha's partitive construction is performing well!

### 5.1 Question/answer pairs!

- Because exclamatives possess the sentential force of exclaiming, they should not be felicitous in contexts in which other speech acts are required.
- Exclamatives should not be able to function as the question or the answer (Zanuttini and Portner 2000, 2003).

(31) As a question

- a. #Naha'wà:rake'  
n-a'-ra-'war-a-k-'  
PART-FACT-MsgA-meat-JR-eat  
'Boy did he eat meat!
- b. Áhsen ní:kon.  
Ahsen ni-kon  
three PART-N.P.count  
'Three.'

(32) As an answer

- a. Tó: ní:kon naha'wá:rake'?  
to ní:kon n-a'-ra-'war-a-k-'  
how.many PART-N.P.count PART-FACT-MsgA-meat-JR-eat  
'How much meat did he eat?'
- b. #Naha'wá:rake'  
n-a'-ra-'war-a-k-'  
PART-FACT-MsgA-meat-JR-eat  
'Boy did he eat meat!'

- Going a step further, can it be used in an imperative?

(33) **What about...**

Nisatshennonníhak!  
 ni-s-atshennonni-ha-k  
 PART-2sgA-be.happy-HAB-CONT  
 'Be so happy!'

### 5.2 Evaluativity!

- For an exclamative to be expressively correct, some aspect of the utterance must exceed a contextual standard based on the evaluation of the speaker resulting in surprise.
- Changing the context changing felicity of surprise

- (34) a. Nikanonhsowá:nen  
 ni-ka-nonhs-owanen  
 PART-N.A-house-be.big  
 'How big the house is!'  
 ✓ You've only lived in a one-story house. This is your first time in a two-story house.  
 ✗ You've only lived in three-story houses. This is your first time in a two-story house.
- b. Nikanonhsà:'a!  
 ni-ka-nonhs-a'-'a  
 PART-N.A-house-measure-DIM  
 'How small the house is!'  
 ✗ You've only lived in a one-story house. This is your first time in a two-story house.  
 ✓ You've only lived in three-story houses. This is your first time in a two-story house.

- Canceling a conventional scalar implicature

- (35) Nihahnén:ies ne Max – #nek tsi iah só:tsi tehahnén:ies.  
 ni-ra-hnenies ne Max nek tsi iah sotsi te-ra-hnenies  
 PART-MsgA-be.tall NE Max but that NEG too NEG-MsgA-be.tall  
 'How tall Max is – but he's not too tall.'

### 5.3 Factivity!

- A long line of work has argued that the semantic content of an exclamative is factive, presupposing its propositional content (Elliott 1974; Grimshaw 1979; Zanuttini and Portner 2003; D'Avis 2002).
- This follows from the intuition that exclamatives express the speaker's emotions towards a proposition that is already entailed in the common ground.

- (36) S: Béatrice's car is beautiful.  
 P1: #Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know that Béatrice's car is beautiful! (Entailment)  
 P2: Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know that Béatrice had a car! (Presupposition)

- (37) **But what about...**  
 S: Nahakarè:tsherake' ne Kór.  
 n-a'-ra-karet-she-a-k-' ne Paul  
 PART-FACT-MsgA-cake-NMLZ-JR-eat-PUNC NE Paul  
 'Boy did Paul eat a lot of cake!'  
 P1: Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know that Paul ate lots of cake (Entailment)  
 P2: Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know that Paul ate cake! (Presupposition)

## 5.4 Degree!

- Many accounts of exclamation relate them to degree semantics, particularly as it related to *wh*- and nominal exclamation (Bolinger 1972; Milner 1978; Gérard 1980; Obenauer 1984; Espinal 1995; Michaelis and Lambrecht 1996; Villalba 2003; Miró 2006; Zanuttini and Portner 2003; Rett 2006).
- These accounts share a classification of exclamation as possessing “degree” interpretations in which surprise is expressed at the exceptional degree of some part of the propositional content.

- (38) a. Ra'wá:raks!  
ra-'war-a-k-s  
MsgA-meat-JR-eat-HAB  
He eats meat!  
✓ Context 1: Everyone eats one piece of meat, including Paul.  
✓ Context 2: Everyone eats one piece of meat but Paul eats five.
- b. Niha'wá:raks!  
ni-ra-'war-a-k-s  
PART-MsgA-meat-JR-eat-HAB  
'Boy does he eat meat!'  
✗ Context 1: Everyone eats one piece of meat, including Paul.  
✓ Context 2: Everyone eats one piece of meat but Paul eats five..

- Degree Restriction (Rett 2008): exclamation are ‘used to express surprise that a set of degrees (such as amounts of gradable properties) has a particular degree property, but not that a set of individuals has a particular individual property’.

(39) Context: You know that Benny speaks one Romance language in addition to English. Because his mother speaks French, you assume it is French. But you discover it is Spanish. (adapted from Rett 2008)

- a. Oh, Benny speaks English and Spanish! (Individual)  
b. #What languages Benny speaks! (Degree)

(40) Context: Someone in the house is hungry and looking for someone to cook dinner. You remember that Paul is here and he cooks.

- a. Kór rakhón:nis!  
Kor ra-khonni-s  
Paul MsgA-cook-HAB  
'Paul cooks!' (Individual)
- b. **But what about...**
- Kór nihakhón:nis!  
Kor ni-ra-khonni-s  
Paul PART-MsgA-cook-HAB  
'Boy does Paul cook!' (Degree)

## 6 Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

- Kanien'kéha has a number of strategies for expressing emotions such as surprise, including interjections, expressive words, and special constructions.
- It appears that Kanien'kéha has its own special exclamation construction, composed of the partitive prefix and a verbal complex.



- These forms have a unique form and share commonly proposed semantic properties of exclamatives.

## 6.2 Next steps

- Looking at differences between verbs that take a 'natural' degree (scalar predicates; be big, be a color, etc) vs. verbs that don't (eat, swim, read, etc).
- Determining the range of meanings possible with a Kanien'kéha exclamation. Most seem to lend themselves to amount readings but what about manner?

(41) Nahakarè:tsherake'   ne Kór.  
       n-a'-ra-karet-sher-a-k-'                                  ne Paul  
       PART-FACT-MSG-A-cake-NMLZ-JR-eat-PUNC NE Paul  
       'Boy did Paul eat a lot of cake!'  
       Can it mean: 'Boy did he eat cake fast!'  
       Can it mean: 'Boy did he eat cake in a crazy way!'

- Do the *EMPH tsi* constructions also pass exclamative tests?
- How does prosody intersect with exclamatives?

## 6.3 A fun addendum: free relative readings

- There is one other context in which the partitive can appear without a referential element: constructions that give rise to free relative readings.

(42) Free relative readings

a. (tsi) ni-ha-wenn-ò:ten  
    c PART-MSG-A-voice-be.a.kind.of  
    'how his voice is' (Bonvillain 1973, 177)

b. (tsi) na'-akó:-ta'we'  
    COMP PART-FL.P-go.to.sleep.HAB?  
    'when one goes to sleep' (Bonvillain 1973, 178)

c. (tsi) na'-t-en-hi-aráhtat-e-'  
    COMP PART-DUP-FUT-MduA-run-EP-PUNC  
    'where they will run' (Wá:ri)

d. (tsi) ni-t-ió:-ien'  
    COMP PART-DUP-FZsgP-have  
    'how old she is' (lit: 'how many she has') (Michelson et al. 2024, 173)

- These sometimes look exactly the same as exclamatives (though not used as matrix clauses).

(43) (tsi) ni-t-ió:-ien'  
       COMP PART-DUP-FZsgP-have  
       'how old she is'  
       'How old she is!'

- However, it is not the case that exclamatives are the same as free relatives. Under the Degree Restriction proposed by Rett (2008), exclamatives are 'used to express surprise that a set of degrees has a particular degree property, but not that a set of individuals has a particular individual property'.
- If this holds in Kanien'kéha, we should expect a difference in the available readings between free relative and exclamative forms.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>(44) na'-t-en-hi-aráhtat-e'<br/>         PART-DUP-FUT-MduA-run-EP-PUNC<br/>         ✓ 'how much they will run'<br/>         ✓ 'where they will run'<br/>         ✓ 'Boy, will they run!'<br/>         ✗ 'What places they will run!'<br/>         ✗ 'Boy will they run in those places!'</p> | <p>(FR degree)<br/>         (FR location individual)<br/>         (EXCL degree)<br/>         (EXCL location degree)<br/>         (EXCL location individual)</p> |
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