

Information Structure in Kanien'kéha

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1 Information Structure

- This semester, we have looked at sounds (phonology), words (morphology), sentences (syntax); but we haven't spent as much time looking at **language use in context**.
- This is often called **information structure**: The way in which information is packaged within a sentence by a speaker, in relation to the discourse context.
- It is often difficult to define exactly what information structure means across languages, but essentially it captures how speakers choose to express a given meaning depending on the context (Lambrecht, 1994).
- Within information structure, people often distinguish between two main categories: **focus** and **topic**.

1.1 Focus

- The **focus** of a sentence is the element that provides new information, and so makes the sentence interesting or worth saying (Aissen, 2023).
- The focus is understood against a **presupposition** or **background**, which is the information that the speaker and addressee already know.
- In English, focus is usually expressed mostly by **intonation**, as in (1) and (2), and sometimes by special **word orders** or specific **constructions** as well, as in (3).

- (1) a. Q: Where is Kim going?
b. A: She's going to PRÁGUE.

- (2) a. Q: Who is going to Prague?
b. A: KÍM's going to Prague. (Aissen, 2023)

- (3) a. Q: Who is it that's going to Prague again?
b. A: It's KÍM (that's going to Prague). (implied: no one else is going to Prague)

- In some cases, focus implies a set of possible alternatives with which the focused item contrasts. This is called **contrastive** focus, as opposed to **information** focus as in (1b).

- (4) a. Q: Did you break the toy?
b. A: No, WÁ:RI broke the toy.

1.2 Topic

- The **topic** of a sentence is what the sentence is about (Aissen, 2023).
- What is said about the topic is often called the **comment**.
- Topics are **managed** by speakers in the discourse:
 - A new entity is introduced into the discourse context.
 - It is established as the topic.
 - It persists as the topic until the speaker shifts to a new topic.
- In English, the expression of topics is clearest in cases of **topic shift**.
- **Context:** Sophia is explaining her family's language background. She first talks about her mom, who grew up speaking English. Then, she wants to shift the topic of conversation to her dad. She might say:

(5) *As for my dad, he grew up speaking Spanish.*

- Like focus, topics can also be **contrastive**. That is, they can be in contrast with other topics in the discourse context:

- (6) a. Q: What do your brother and sister do for work?
b. A: *My brother* is a musician. *My sister* is a historian.

2 Information Structure in Kanien'kéha

2.1 Focus

- In Kanien'kéha, the focused element always appears in the initial position in the sentence. There seems to be no difference in marking between the different types of focus.
- If there is no external noun to place in the focus (or topic) position, an independent **emphatic** pronoun is used instead.
- Focus constructions appear with a special **prosody** (or intonation), where the focused element is pronounced louder and with higher pitch, which then progressively drops until the end of the utterance.

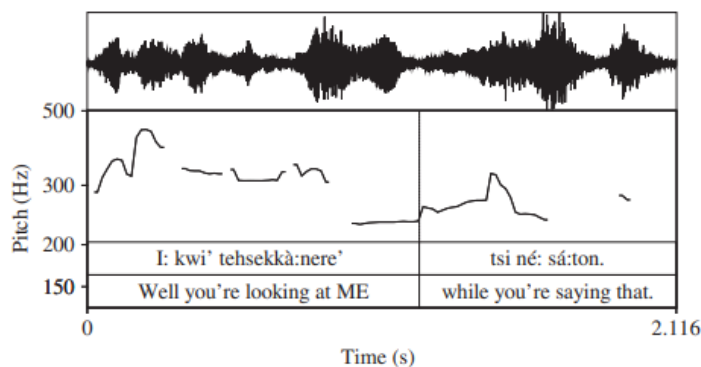


Figure 1.1 Focused pronoun 'me.'

Figure 1: (Mithun, 2015)

2.1.1 Information focus

- (7) a. Ónhka wáhtshken'?
onhka wa-htsh-ken-'
who FACT-2SG>MSG-see-PUNC
'Who did you see?'
- b. Brad Pitt wahí:ken'.
Brad Pitt wa-ri-ken-'.
Brad Pitt FACT-1SG>MSG-see-PUNC
'I saw BRAD PITT.'
- (8) a. Nahó:ten wa'thá:rihte'?
nahoten wa'-t-ha-riht-e'
what FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC
'What did he break?'
- b. Ionttkari'tákhwa' wa'thá:rihte'!
io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a' wa'-t-ha-riht-e'
N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC
'He broke the TOY!'
- (9) a. Ónhka wa'tié:rihte' ionttkari'tákhwa'?
onhka wa'-t-ie-riht-e' io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a'
who FACT-DUP-FLA-break-PUNC N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF
'Who broke the toy?'
- b. Raónha wa'thá:rihte' ne ionttkari'tákhwa'!
raonha wa'-t-ha-riht-e' ne io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a'
he FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC NE N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF
'HE broke the toy!'
- c. #Wa'thá:rihte' raónha ne ionttkari'tákhwa'!
wa'-t-ha-riht-e' raonha ne io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a'
FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC he NE N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF
'He BROKE the toy!'
- d. #Ionttkari'tákhwa' wa'thá:rihte'!
io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a' wa'-t-ha-riht-e'
N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC
'He broke the TOY!'

2.1.2 Contrastive focus

- (10) a. Katya ken só:ra én:ieke'?
Katya ken sora en-ie-ke-'
Katya Q duck FUT-FLA-eat-PUNC
'Will Katya eat the duck?'
- b. Iah, í só:ra én:keke'.
Iah, i sora en-ke-ke-'.
NEG I duck FUT-1SGA-eat-PUNC
'No, I will eat the duck.'

- (11) a. Takó:s ken róhsere ne raksá:'a?
 takos ken ro-hsere ne ra-ksa'a
 cat Q MSG>MSG-follow.STAT NE MSG-child
 'Is the cat following the boy?'
- b. Iah takó:s tehohsere ne raksá:'a, érhár róhsere ne raksá:'a.
 iah takos te-ro-hsere ne ra-ksa'a, erhar ro-hsere ne ra-ksa'a.
 NEG cat NEG-MSG>MSG-follow.STAT NE MSGA-child dog MSG>MSG-follow.STAT NE MSGA-child
 'The cat is not following the boy, THE DOG is following the boy.'
- c. #Iah takó:s tehohsere ne raksá:'a, raksá:'a róhsere ne
 iah takos te-ro-hsere ne ra-ksa-'a, ra-ksa-'a ro-hsere ne
 NEG cat NEG-MSG>MSG-follow.STAT NE MSGA-child-DIM MSGA-child-DIM MSG>MSG-follow.STAT NE
 érhár.
 erhar.
 dog
 'The cat is not following the boy, the boy is following the dog.'

2.1.3 Incorporation vs. excorporation

- DeCaire et al. (2017) claim that noun incorporation is obligatory where possible, and 'excorporation' arises as a result of focus on either the object noun, as in (12), or the verb itself, as in (13).

- (12) a. Wahahonwahní:non' ken ne Sewátis?
 wa-ha-honw-a-hninon-' ken ne Sewatis
 FACT-MSGA-boat-JR-buy-PUNC Q NE John
 'Did John buy a boat?'
- b. Iah. Kà:sere wahahní:non'.
 iah ka-'ser-e' wa-ha-hninon-'
 no N.A-car-NSF FACT-MSGA-buy-PUNC
 'No. He bought A CAR.'
- c. #Iah. Waha'serehtahní:non'.
 iah wa-ha-'sereht-a-hninon'
 no FACT-MSGA-car-JR-buy-PUNC
 'No. He BOUGHT A CAR.'
- (13) a. Wa'ehní:non' ne kahonwé:ia ne Wá:ri.
 wa-e-hninon-' ne ka-honwei-a' ne Wari
 FACT-F.SG-buy-PUNC NE N-boat-NS NE Mary
 'Mary BOUGHT a boat.'
- b. #Wá:ri wa'ehní:non' ne kahonwé:ia.
 Wari wa-e-hninon-' ne ka-honwei-a'
 Mary FACT-F.SG-buy-PUNC NE N-boat-NS
 'MARY bought a boat.'
- c. #Kahonwé:ia wa'ehní:non' ne Wá:ri.
 ka-honwei-a' wa-e-hninon-' ne Wari
 N-boat-NS FACT-F.SG-buy-PUNC NE Mary
 'Mary bought a BOAT.'

d. ?*Wa'ehní:non' ne Wári ne kahonwé:ia.
 wa-e-hninon-' ne Wari ne ka-honwei-a'
 FACT-F.SG-buy-PUNC NE Mary NE N-boat-NS
 'Mary BOUGHT a boat.'

- The example in (13d) also shows that, in cases of verb focus, the order of post-verbal nominals is fixed to object - subject (although in spontaneous speech one or both of these is likely to be dropped).
- If focus is on the subject, the object must be incorporated, since it cannot be in the focus position:

- (14) a. Ónhka wa'ehonwahní:non'?
 onhka wa'-e-honw-a-hninon-'
 who FACT-FL.A-boat-JR-buy-PUNC
 'Who bought a boat?'
- b. Wá:ri wa'ehonwahní:non'.
 Wari wa-e-honw-a-hninon-'
 Mary FACT-FL.A-boat-JR-buy-PUNC
 'MARY bought a boat.'
- c. #Kahonwé:ia' wa'ehní:non' ne Wá:ri.
 ka-honwei-a' wa'-e-hninon-' ne Wari
 N.A-boat-NSF FACT-FL.A-buy-PUNC NE Mary
 'Mary bought a BOAT.'

2.2 Topic

- In Kanien'kéha, topic shifts and contrastive topics are also realized on the left edge of the sentence, but we will see that it is not the same position as focus.

2.2.1 Topic shift

- In Kanien'kéha (and in many languages), topic shifts are signaled by detaching the topic expression to the left of the main sentence. This is called a **topicalization** construction.
- **Context:** The speaker was talking about the kinship terms for in-laws that he uses, and then shifted the topic from himself to his father, to discuss the terms that this side of the family uses.

(44) Rake'níha ses aa,
 he is father to me formerly HES
 'My father and his family ah,

 wahonì:ron',
 they said
 they used to say

 'Tiári!
 'Sister-in-Law!'

Figure 2: (Mithun, 2015)

- Topicalization constructions also have a special prosody: The topicalized element is pronounced louder and with higher pitch, like focused elements.
- Contrary to focused elements, however, topicalized elements are separated from the following sentence into a separate intonation unit, as we can see with the pause and hesitation *aa* here.

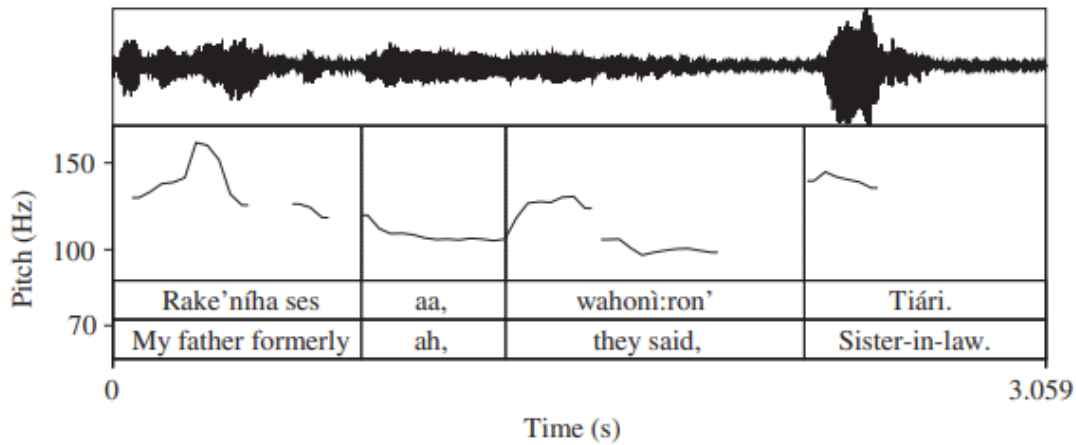


Figure 1.5 Topic shift.

Figure 3: (Mithun, 2015)

2.2.2 Contrastive topics

- (15) a. Nahó:ten ninón:wes ne sheién:’a tánon’ tsién:’a?
 nahoten ni-nonwe-s ne she-ien-’a tanon’ ts-ien-’a?
 what Mdua-like-HAB NE 2SG>FZSG-child-DIM and 2SG>MSG-child-DIM
 ‘What do your daughter and son like?’
- b. Riién:’a raon’wéskwani ahá:raste, kheién:’a iakaon’wéskwani ne
 ri-ien-’a ra-on’weskwani a-há:-rast-e’, khe-ien-’a iaka-on’weskwani ne
 1SG>MSG-child-DIM MSGP-enjoy.STAT OPT-MSGA-draw-PUNC 1SG>FI-child-DIM FIP-enjoy.STAT NE
 aióntswa’té’ tewa’á:raton.
 a-ion-tswa’t-e’ tewa’araton.
 OPT-FISGA-play-PUNC lacrosse
 ‘My son likes to draw, my daughter likes to play lacrosse.’
- Contrastive topics and foci can co-occur in the same sentence, with the contrastive topic always to the left of the focus, which shows that they are not in the same position.
- (16) a. Q: What are you going to buy for your son and daughter for Christmas?
- b. Riién:’a okón:tshera’ enhihnínon’sé’, tánon kheién:’a soccer ahthé:non
 ri-ien-’a okon-tsher-a en-hi-hninon-’s-e’, tánon khe-ien-’a soccer ahtenon
 1SG>MSG-child-DIM paint FUT-1SG>MSG-buy-BEN-PUNC and 1SG>FI-child-DIM soccer ball
 enkhehnínonse’.
 en-khe-hninon-’s-e’.
 FUT-1SG>FI-buy-BEN-PUNC
 ‘For my son, I’ll buy paint for him, and for my daughter, I’ll buy a soccer ball for her.’

- (17) a. Q: When will you buy them?
 b. Soccer ahthé:non ó:nen wakhní:non. Okón:tshera enióhrhenne' enkhní:non'.
 soccer ahthenon onen wak-hninon. okontshera eniohrhenne' en-k-hninon-'.
 soccer ball already 1SGA-buy.STAT paint tomorrow FUT-1SGA-buy-PUNC
 'The soccer ball, I already bought. The paint, I'll buy tomorrow.'

- (18) Katya kítkit é:níeke', tánon' í: só:ra é:n:keke'.
 Katya kitkit en-ie-ke-', tanon' i sora en-ke-ke-'.
 Katya chicken FUT-FLA-eat-PUNC and I duck FUT-1SGA-eat-PUNC
 'Katya will eat the chicken, and I will eat the duck.'

2.2.3 Antitopics

- Kanien'kéha also has a special **antitopic** construction, where a referring expression is added at the end of the sentence, in order to confirm the current topic under discussion (as opposed to establishing a new topic).

(46) A: 'We're not conscious of it (the complexity of the language) when we're writing.
 When we're writing, that's when we realize how smart we are.'

B: 'And that's why I strive to write our language correctly.'

Iáh tekari:wes iáh kén: taonsetewè:seke',
 not it is matter long not here will we still be walking around

ne tewahrónkha'.
 the we talk the lg

'Before long we'll no longer be here, we fluent ones.'

Figure 4: (Mithun, 2015)

- We find a special prosody here as well: The antitopic expression is pronounced with lower and flatter pitch, and sometimes creaky voice.

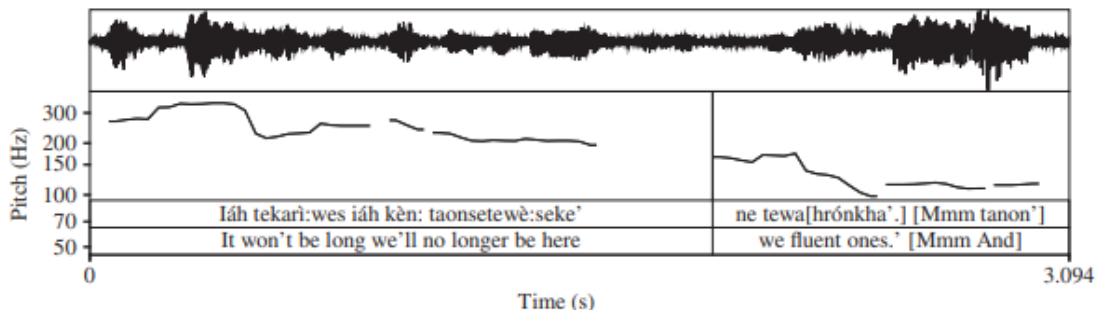


Figure 1.7 The antitopic construction.

Figure 5: (Mithun, 2015)

2.3 A note on *ne*

- The particle *ne* often occurs before antitopics (maybe it is a topic marker?), but it cannot occur in focus position:

- (19) a. Chase katon Sophia iontenkiónhe?
Chase katon Sophia ion-tenkionhe
Chase or Sophia FI-go.away.STAT
'Is it Chase or Sophia that's moving away?'
- b. Chase ratenkiónhe.
Chase ra-tenkionhe.
Chase MSGA-go.away.STAT
'Chase is moving away.'
- c. #Ne Chase ratenkiónhe.
Ne Chase ra-tenkiónhe.
NE Chase MSGA-go.away.STAT
'Chase is moving away.'
- d. #Ratenkiónhe ne Chase.
Ra-tenkionhe ne Chase.
MSGA-go.away.STAT NE Chase
'Chase is moving away.'
- (20) a. Nahó:ten wa'thá:rihte'?
nahoten wa'-t-ha-riht-e'
what textscfact-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC
'What did he break?'
- b. Ionttkari'tákhwa' wa'thá:rihte'!
io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a' wa'-t-ha-riht-e'
N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC
'He broke the TOY!'
- c. ?Ne ionttkari'tákhwa' wa'thá:rihte'.
ne io-nttkari'ta-hkhwa-a' wa'-t-ha-riht-e'.
NE N.P-play.with-INSTR-NSF FACT-DUP-MSGA-break-PUNC
'He broke the toy.'

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