

# Kanien'kéha Kinship Unexpected Forms of Transitivity

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## Introducing kinship terms

Kanien'kéha kinship terms like those in (1) and (2) use *transitive pronominal prefixes*; the senior member of the relation is encoded like a grammatical agent, and the junior member is encoded like a patient (Mithun 2010); compare verbs in (3) and (4):

- |                                                            |                                                      |                                                                         |                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. rake'níha<br>rake-níha<br>MSG>1SG-father<br>'my father' | 2. riien':a<br>ri-ien'a<br>1SG>MSG-child<br>'my son' | 3. rakenòn:we's<br>rake-nonhwe'-s<br>MSG>1SG-like-HAB<br>'he likes me.' | 4. rinòn:we's<br>ri-nonhwe'-s<br>1SG>MSG-like-HAB<br>'I like him.' |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Puzzle:** First-language (L1) speakers of Kanien'kéha sometimes reverse agent/patient roles, but only with specific pronouns.

**Proposal:** The reason for this reversal is due to L1 speakers of Kanien'kéha wishing to specify clusivity in contexts which call for it. These reversals may also be found in ceremonial language, which may form the foundation for speakers to access grammaticality of agent/patient reversal.



## Transitivity in Kanien'kéha

Stem	Object (patient)										
	2SG	2DU	2PL	1SG	1DU	1PL	FZ.SG	M.SG	FI	FZ.DU/PL	M.DU/PL
Subject (agent)											
2SG				take-	takeni-	takwa-	(h)ise-	(e)tshe-	(h)she-		
2DU				takeni-	takeni-	takwa-	seni-	(e)tshe-	ietshi-		
2PL				takwa-	takwa-	takwa-	sewa-	(e)tshe-			
1SG	kon-	keni-	kwa-				ke-	ri-	khe-		
1EX.DU	keni-	keni-	kwa-				iakeni-	(h)shakeni-	iakhi-		
1EX.PL	kwa-	kwa-	kwa-				iakwa-	(h)shakwa-			
1IN.DU							teni-	(h)shiteni-	ietshi-		
1IN.PL							tewa-	(h)shitewa-			
FZ.SG	sa-	seni-	sewa-	wake-	ionkeni-	ionkwa-	io-	ro-	ia-		
M.SG	(h)ia-	(e)tshe-	(e)tshe-	rake-	(h)shonkeni-	(h)shonkwa-	ra-		(h)shako-		
FI	ies-	ietshi-		ionke-	ionkhi-		konwa-	ronwa-	iontate-	konwati-	ronwati-
FZ.DU/PL									iakoti-		
M.DU/PL									(h)shakoti-		

Table 1: Transitive pronominal prefixes in Kanien'kéha

In Kanien'kéha, transitive verbs utilize specific pronominal prefixes that specify features of agents and patients.

5. shonkwarihonnién:nis  
shonkwa-rihw-onni-enni-s  
MSG>1PL-matter-make-BEN-HAB  
'our (male) teacher' (literal: he teaches us)

## Kanien'kéha possession and kinship

Kanien'kéha uses prefixes related to the *patient set* of prefixes to specify alienable possession, but these cannot be used for kinship

- |                                                       |                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6. raò:sere<br>rao-'sere<br>MSG.POSS-car<br>'his car' | 7. *rao'níha<br>rao-'níha<br>MSG.POSS-father<br>intended: 'his father' |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
- Kanien'kéha kinship terms express a bilateral relationship. For symmetrical relationships, patient prefixes are used, as in (8)
- For asymmetrical relationship, **transitive prefixes** are used, as in (1), (2), and (9):
- |                                                                                              |                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8. ontíara:sè:'a<br>(i)ontia-ra'se'a<br>1DUP-cousin<br>'my cousin' (lit: 'we 2 are cousins') | 9. khe'kèn:'a<br>khe-'ken'a<br>1sg>FI-younger.sibling<br>'my younger sister' (lit: 'I sibling her') |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## The puzzle

- I created a story with the objective of making a resource for L2 learners of Kanien'kéha to practice transitive pronouns within context.
- The story aimed to target the use of almost all transitive pronouns within the context of kinship.
- When translating the story from English to Kanien'kéha, unexpected forms occur that do not follow the regular grammatical rules of Kanien'kéha kinship.

### 10. Expected

Tshienté:ri ken ne shonkwa'níha?  
Tsh-ienteri ken ne shonkwa-'níha  
2SG>MSG-know Q NE MSG>1PL-'father  
'Do you know our father?'  
(lit: 'Do you know him, he who fathers us?')

Ì: shakwaia'tí:saks ne shonkwa'níha.  
I shakwa-ia't-isaks ne shonkwa-'níha  
1PRON 1EX.PL>3MSG-body-search NE 3MSG>1PL-father  
'We are looking for our father.'  
(lit: 'We are looking for him, he who fathers us')

### 11. Elicited

Tshienté:ri ken ne shakwa'níha?  
Tsh-ienteri ken ne shakwa-'níha  
2SG>MSG-know Q NE 1IN.PL>MSG-father  
'Do you know our father?'  
(lit: 'We are looking for him, we who father him')

Ì: shakwaia'tí:saks ne shakwa'níha.  
I shakwa-ia't-isaks ne shakwa-'níha  
1PRON 1EX.PL>MSG-body-search NE 1IN.PL>MSG-father  
'We are looking for our father.'  
(literal: 'we are looking for him, we who father him')

## Comparison with non-kinship terms



Image 1: No pronoun reversal Image 2: Pronoun reversal

12. Shakwaia'tí:saks ne shonkwarihonnién:nis  
shakwa-ia't-isak-s NE shonkwa-rihw-onni-enni  
1PL.EX>MSG-body-look-HAB NE MSG>1PL-matter-make-BEN-STAT  
'our (male) teacher' (literal: he teaches us)
13. Shakwaia'tí:saks ne shakwarihonnién:nis  
shakwa-ia't-isak-s NE shakwa-rihw-onni-enni  
1PL.EX>MSG-body-look-HAB NE 1IN.PL>MSG-matter-make-BEN-STAT  
\*Intended: our (male) teacher'

- To test whether pronoun reversals occur with regular transitive verbal complexes, a non-kinship verb was used in an identical context to the original story.
- Kanien'kéha L1 Speakers will quickly judge pronoun reversals present in non-kinship terms as ungrammatical.

## Variation is limited



Image 3: Expected forms Image 4: Pronoun reversal forms

- Speakers of multiple dialects produce and accept pronoun reversals, **but reversals are limited:**
  - Reversals involved **1st person non-singular pronouns**—specific to forms where a inclusive/exclusive contrast may be involved
  - Variation appears to be limited to kinship terms, and is not possible with regular verbs

## Conclusions

- Overall, reversals in agent/patient assignment in kinship are not produced naturally by all L1 speakers of Kanien'kéha. However, L1 speakers will still recognize reversed kinship pronominal prefixes as equally grammatical as non-reversed pronominal prefixes.
- Proposal:** This phenomenon may be due to a speaker's desire to express clusivity. **Dual and plural forms specify clusivity only for grammatical agents but not for patients (compare (10) and (11)).**
- Reversals are not limited to elicitation contexts.** (12) was found in discourse on a the All Kanien'kéha Radio Talkshow (1992). The speaker told a story about their late grandfather to another individual who does not share the same grandparent to her. I suggest that this is the result of a speaker's desire to express a contrast between inclusive and exclusive (not possible with the non-reversed form).

14. shakwa'shoht'kénha  
shakwa-shoht-'kenha  
1PL.EX>MSG-grandfather-late  
'our (excl) late grandfather'

- Pronoun reversals are also found in ceremonial language:

15. ionkhi'nisténha  
ionkhi-'nistenha  
FI>1DU/PL-mother  
'our mother' (literal: 'she mothers us')
16. iethi'nisténha  
lethi-'nistenha  
1DU/PL>FI-mother  
'our mother' (literal: 'we mother her')

- If ceremonial language includes both forms, this may form the basis for why L1 Kanien'kéha speakers recognize both forms as grammatical.
- Overall, L1 speakers judge both forms as grammatical. However, whether they produce both forms during translation tasks varies. This variation is not random, but due to some desire for L1 speakers of Kanien'kéha to express clusivity of kinship through discourse.

## In the context of Indigenous language revitalization...

- This project served as topic of discussion with other L1 and L2 speakers within the context of language revitalization by addressing the topic of language variation across families, communities, and dialects.
- The findings of this project allows learners to see interesting ways in which L1 speakers will express kinship that differ from rule-based lessons in class. As second language learners of indigenous languages, it reminds us to be open to variation. Teaching L2 learners of Kanien'kéha that such variation exists gives more insight as to how we expect the language to work versus how it may actually work.

## Acknowledgements

Niawen'kó:wa to the following for translations and elicitation.

- Mary Onwá:ri McDonald
- Helen Konwaronhiá:wi Norton
- Kateri Deer

Thanks also to Karin Michelson, Wishe Mittelstaedt, Akwiratékha Martin, and the Roti'nikonhrowá:nens research group for feedback and discussion.

This project was inspired by a class project in a Linguistic Field Methods class, taught by Professor Jessica Coon, held at McGill University in the fall of 2023. The project aimed to create a story that could be used as a resource for L2 learners of Kanien'kéha to practice transitive pronouns within context.

The story was created by Kanontienénhtha' Brass, Sophia Flaim, Genevieve Kam, Ava Gilmour, and Abigail Wolfensohn. Kanien'kéha Translations were provided by Mary Tekahawáhkwen McDonald.

See the stories below!

Í:se ken rake'níha?



Í:se ken ake'nisténha?



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