FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD PERSON IMPERATIVES IN KANIEN'KÉHA*

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1. Introduction

Most languages have a special sentential form used uniquely to expressive a command or request. Such directive clauses are called IMPERATIVES. It is widely recognized that the subjects of imperative clauses have a restricted interpretation: they refer to, quantify over, or overlap in reference with the addressee(s), as seen in English in (1).

(1) a. (You) eat dinner!
b. Don't anybody move!
c. Boys be the cops and girls be the robbers! (Schmerling 1982: 216)

In these languages, it is impossible for the imperative subject to refer to a non-addressee such as the speaker or a third party. This is shown for English in (2) where imperatives with first person singular, first person plural, and third person subjects are ungrammatical (and hard to even parse).

(2) a. *(I) eat dinner! (First singular)
b. *Don't we move! (First plural)
c. *The table be clean! (Third)

The generalization that imperatives typically have second person subjects has informed the vast majority of theoretical work on the clause type. Though accounts have proposed different mechanisms for generating imperative semantics (see, e.g., Portner 2004; Zanuttini et al. 2012; Kaufmann 2012; Charlow 2014, among many others), these theories all share a common assumption that the prototypical imperative is a second person one and that if imperatives with other subjects exist in a language, their interpretation must necessarily be derived from the same underlying mechanism as the second person prototype.

Thus, in a language like Bhojpuri, an imperative can have a third person subject, like in (3), but typically such a form still expresses a command to the addressee. In this case shown here, the third person imperative can be used to command the addressee to eat in a more polite way than the standard second person imperative or to command the addressee

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to see to it that the third person subject eats, both of which fall in line with an approach in which second person imperatives are the de facto model.[1]

(3) kʰa:y
eat.IMP.3P
'(You) eat! (polite)' or (You) let him eat!' (Zanuttini et al. 2012: 1252)

However, this is not the complete story. Zanuttini et al. (2012) note that the third person form in Bhojpuri can *also* give rise to a third, "optative" reading in which the addressee is *not* involved, as shown in (4). In this use, the utterance makes no demand of any speech act participant.

(4) kʰa:y
eat.IMP.3P
'May he eat!'

This data point is challenging for a theory which assumes that imperative semantics involve some subset of addressees. Likely for this reason, Zanuttini et al. (2012) choose not to include this use of the third person imperative in their analysis which relies on imperative semantics being founded on a prototypical second person imperative.

In this paper, we seek to re-examine datapoints like this by drawing on novel data from Kanien'kéha (a.k.a. Mohawk; Iroquoian) which also possesses non-second person imperative subjects. In doing so, we argue that the Kanien'kéha data provides strong evidence that the primacy of second person imperatives in accounts of cross-linguistic imperative semantics is problematic. In Kanien'kéha at least, there is no reason to assume that imperatives with one subject or another are prioritized in the grammar, let alone second person ones.

To show this, we make three central claims: (i) Kanien'kéha imperatives are true imperatives which possess commonly proposed properties of the imperative clause type; (ii) unlike most other true imperatives in the literature, Kanien'kéha imperatives exhibit a full paradigm of inflection, allowing for any subject that a non-imperative clause does, including non-second person subjects; and (iii) the interpretation of Kanien'kéha imperatives is not tied to the addressee but to the imperative subject. Taken together, these claims cast doubt on the assumption that imperatives are canonically speech acts aimed at directing the addressee. We argue instead that the Kanien'kéha facts militate against past analyses founded on the prototypicality of second person imperatives and suggest that a unified analysis of the clause type might better be served by an approach in which all imperatives are on equal footing with language-specific restrictions giving rise to the restrictions on

[1] Abbreviations follow Leipzig glossing conventions with the following additions from Iroquoianist literature: CIS = cislocative; DUP = duplicative; EP = epenthetic vowel; FACT = factual; HAB = habitual; OPT = optative; and PUNC = punctual. Agreement prefixes belong to one of three categories: agentive/subjective (A); patientive/objective (P) or transitive (X>Y) where X is the agent and Y is the patient.

imperative subjects commonly observed.

2. Kanien'kéha imperatives are true imperatives

In this section, we introduce the Kanien'kéha imperative forms, using widely accepted diagnostics to demonstrate that what we are calling imperatives in Kanien'kéha are true imperatives on par with those previously documented and analyzed in the literature.

2.1 Introducing Kanien'kéha imperatives

Kanien'kéha is a Northern Iroquoian language spoken by ∼600 people in Quebec, Ontario, and New York state (DeCaire 2023). While the majority of speakers are first language Elders, there are a number of fluent second-language speakers (Stacey 2016). All unattributed examples in this paper come from fieldwork conducted by the authors in collaboration with two native speakers of Kanien'kéha from the community of Ahkwesáhsne. This research adopts standard theoretically-driven fieldwork methodology (see, e.g., Matthewson 2004; Bowern 2008; Bochnak and Matthewson 2020).

Kanien'kéha is a polysynthetic language with a wide array of derivational and inflectional morphology, particularly in verbs (Martin 2023). A standard verb template is shown in (5). Minimally, the verb includes a pronominal prefix expressing agreement, a verb stem, and an aspectual suffix, but it often also includes additional optional affixes expressing notions like mood.

(5) (PRE-PRONOMINAL PREFIX –) PRONOMINAL PREFIX – [VERB STEM] – ASPECT

Verbs in the imperative form, on the other hand, are relatively simple, consisting minimally of just a pronominal prefix and a verb stem. This "bare" form is evident when comparing the same verb in the declarative and imperative, as seen in (6). While the declarative form includes both a pre-pronominal modal prefix and an aspect suffix, its imperative counterpart only contains a verb stem marked for agreement.

(6) a. **En**hsatá:wen**'**.
en-hs-atawen-**'**
FUT-1SGA-swim-**PUNC**
'You will swim.'

b. Satá:wen!
s-atawen
2SGA-swim
'Swim!'

2.2 Properties of true imperatives

Kanien'kéha imperative clauses exhibit many widely documented cross-linguistic properties of canonical imperatives, providing evidence that they are true imperative clauses.[2] Most strikingly, in true imperatives, the verb is drawn from a distinct verbal paradigm, which is used exclusively for directive speech acts (Isac 2015). This is clearly the case in Kanien'kéha where imperatives are morphologically distinct from other clause types. As seen in (6), imperatives differ from declaratives in lacking any mood prefixes or aspectual suffixes. This distinction carries across clause types in the language, distinguishing imperatives from interrogatives and exclamatives as well. As seen in (7), it is infelicitous to use the bare imperative form in questions and exclamatives.

(7) a. #Satá:wen ken?
s-atawen ken
2SGA-swim Q
Intended: 'Do you swim?'

b. #Nihsatá:wen!
ni-hs-atawen
PART-2SGA-swim
Intended: 'Boy do you swim!'

Beyond its form, Kanien'kéha imperatives also pattern like true imperatives across several other widely recognized diagnostics (Portner 2018). First, imperatives cannot be true or false. As demonstrated in (8), it is infelicitous to say that an imperative is false in Kanien'kéha, just as it is in English.

(8) a. Ohné:kanos shnekì:ra!
ohnekanos s-hnekihra
water 2SGA-drink
'Drink water!'

b. #Iah tó:ske' té:ken!
iah toske' te-k-en
no true NEG-N-be
'That's not true!'

Second, imperatives commonly use alternative strategies for negation, in comparison to other clause types. In Kanien'kéha, most sentences are negated by starting the sentence with the word *iah* 'no' and adding the negative pre-pronominal prefix to the verb, as in (9).

[2]This is in contrast to non-canonical imperative constructions like English *let* imperatives and so-called "surrogate" or "suppletive" imperatives formed from subjunctives or imperatives (Isac 2015).

However, using this same strategy with an imperative is ungrammatical (10a). Instead, an alternative strategy, involving the word *tóhsa* is required (10b).

(9) **Iah te**hshiá:tons.
iah te-hs-hiaton-s
no **NEG**-2SGA-write-HAB
'You **don't** write.' (*iah te-* + declarative)

(10) a. *__Iah te__hshiá:ton!
iah te-hs-hiaton
no **NEG**-2SGA-write
Intended: '**Don't** write!' (*iah te-* + imperative)

b. **Tóhsa** shiá:ton!!
tohsa s-hiaton
NEG.IMP 2SGA-write
'**Don't** write!' (*Tóhsa* + imperative)

Third, imperatives commonly cannot be embedded (Sadock and Zwicky 1985; Palmer 2001). Again, this holds true for Kanien'kéha where attempts to embed an imperative are ungrammatical, as demonstrated in (11). Embedded clauses must always have both a modal prefix and an aspectual suffix, as seen in (12).

(11) *Tewakatonhontsó:ni shnekì:ra!
tewakatonhontsoni s-hnekihra
I.need 2SGA-drink
Intended: 'I need you to drink it!'

(12) Tewakatonhontsó:ni **a**hshnekì:ra**'**!
tewakatonhontsoni **a**-hs-hnekihra-**'**
I.need **OPT**-2SGA-drink-**PUNC**
'I need you to drink it!'

3. No restrictions on subjects in Kanien'kéha imperatives

Having demonstrated that Kanien'kéha imperatives are true imperatives, we turn now to examining imperative subjects in the language. As noted in the Introduction, imperative subjects are typically limited to second person. In English, for instance, it is ungrammatical for a true imperative to have a first or third person subject, as shown in (2), replicated below as (13).

(13) a. *(I) eat dinner! (First person singular subject)
b. *Don't we move! (First person plural subject)

c. *The table be clean! (Third person subject)

In Kanien'kéha, however, there is no such restriction. True imperatives share the same paradigm of agreement as any other clauses in the language. In addition to the prototypical second person subject, imperatives can also have subjects with any person, number, or gender features. For person, this includes first, second, and third. For number, this includes singular, dual, and plural. For gender, this includes masculine, feminine-zoic, and feminine-indefinite. The full range of person inflection in declaratives is shown in (14); this same range is seen in imperatives in (15).

(14) Declarative

a. Katkáhthos.
k-atkahtho-s
1SGA-look-HAB
'I look at it.'

b. Sátstha.
s-atst-ha
2SGA-use-HAB
'You use it.'

c. Òn:keren'ne'.
wa'-w-a'ker-en'n-e'
FACT-N.P-snow-fall-PUNC
'It snowed.'

(15) Imperative

a. Katkáhtho!
k-atkahtho
1SGA-look
'(I) look at it.' (First person)

b. Í:satst!
i-s-atst
EP-2SGA-use
'(You) use it!' (Second person)

c. Wà:keren'n!
w-a'ker-en'n
N.A-snowflake-fall
'Snow fall!' (Third person)

The paradigm of full inflection in imperatives is summarized for the verb *hiaton* 'write' in the table in (16).[3]

(16) Full paradigm of agent agreement

hiaton	First	Second	Masculine	Fem.-Zoic	Fem.-Indef.
SG	**K**hiáton!	**S**hiáton!	**Ra**hiáton!	**Ie**hiáton!	**Ka**hiáton!
DU	**Teni**hiáton!	**Seni**hiáton!	**Ni**hiáton!	**Keni**hiáton!	**Keni**hiáton!
PL	**Tewa**hiáton!	**Sewa**hiáton!	**Rati**hiáton!	**Konti**hiáton!	**Konti**hiáton!

What's more, imperative agreement also matches standard agreement in marking distinctions in argument structure. In Kanien'kéha, pronominal prefixes come in three flavors. For intransitive verbs, arguments can be marked with either agent or patient agreement. For

[3]Imperative subjects, like standard subjects, can also show an additional clusivity distinction but for the purposes of space, we've left this out here, but see (19a) for an example of an exclusive first person plural imperative subject. We also left out neuter agreement here as 'write' typically requires a human subject, but see (15c) for an example of a neuter imperative subject.

transitive verbs, both arguments are marked on the verb with a portmanteau prefix. Examples of each of these types of prefixes are shown in declarative clauses in (17). Notably, the same pronominal prefixes are used in the imperative counterparts in (18), highlighting further the lack of restrictions on the paradigm of inflection for imperatives in Kanien'kéha.

(17) Declarative

a. Sewahiá:tons.
sewa-hiaton-s
2PLA-write-HAB
'You all write.'

b. Satétshens.
s-atetshen-s
2SGP-dream-HAB
'You dream.'

c. Tshró:ris.
tsh-hrori-s
2SG>MSG-tell-HAB
'You tell him.'

(18) Imperative

a. Sewahiá:ton!
sewa-hiaton
2PLA-write
'Write!' (Agent)

b. Satétshen!
s-atetshen
2SGP-dream
'Dream!' (Patient)

c. Tshró:ri!
tsh-hrori
2SG>MSG-tell
'Tell him!' (Transitive)

In summary, unlike most imperatives in the literature, Kanien'kéha imperatives show no restrictions on their subjects. They can have any subject that a standard declarative can have. There is no marked preference for second person subjects or restrictions on non-second person subjects, making imperatives fully productive within the range of inflection available in the language.

4. Interpreting Kanien'kéha imperatives

The interpretation of imperatives in Kanien'kéha depends on the subject, as exemplified in (19). In translating to English, for instance, each type requires a different strategy even though all share the same base form in Kanien'kéha.

(19) a. Iakwatahónhsatat!
iakwa-atahonhsatat!
1PL.EXCLA-listen
'Let's listen!' (First person imperative)

b. Sewatahónhsatat!
sewa-atahonhsatat
2PLA-listen
'Listen!' (Second person imperative)

c. Konwatahónhsatat!
ka-atahonhsatat!
FPLA-listen
'May they listen!' (Third person imperative)

For second person imperatives, the interpretation is the same as the standard interpretation of proposed canonical imperatives cross-linguistically. As shown in (20), these forms command the addressee(s) to take action.

(20) a. Satshó:ri!
s-atshori
2SGA-eat.soup
'(You) eat soup!'

b. Tsatshó:ri!
ts-atshori
2DUA-eat.soup
'(You two) eat soup!'

c. Sewatshó:ri!
sewa-atshori
2PLA-eat.soup
'(You all) eat soup!'

For first and third person imperatives, the addressee is not involved. First person imperatives express the wish of the speaker(s) to do something. While such interpretations are similar to promissive or hortative readings as documented in other languages (see, e.g., Zanuttini et al. 2012 on Korean), they often feel more immediate. Examples of such imperatives are presented in (21).

(21) a. Tó: katshó:ri!
to k-atshori
hey 1SGA-eat.soup
'Let me eat soup!'

b. Tó: tewatshó:ri!
to tewa-atshori
hey 1PL.INCLA-eat.soup
'Let's eat soup!'

To convey the reading in English, we've used *let*-imperatives but this is a false equivalency. While *let*-imperatives in English can also be used to command the addressee to

allow the speaker to do something, the Kanien'kéha imperatives lack any notion of permission. As shown in (22), it is infelicitous to use a first person imperative to command the addressee to allow something; instead, to express that an alternate construction with the verb *rihon* 'allow' is required.

(22) Context: You typically aren't allowed by your mom to eat soup because you spill all the time. You really want to eat some soup though so you try to make your mom let you eat some.

a. #Tó: katshó:ri!
to k-atshori
hey 1SGA-eat.soup
Intended: 'Allow me to eat soup!'

b. Takeríhon akatshó:ri!
tak-e-rihon a-k-atshori
2SG>1SG-EP-allow OPT-1SGA-eat.soup
'Let me eat soup!'

Thus, first person imperatives in Kanien'kéha never make a demand on the addressee. They instead express simply that the speaker(s) will do something, typically immediately. In this way, first person imperatives share the urgency of second person commands but without the involvement of the addressee.

Similarly, third person imperatives also do not involve the addressee. Unlike in languages like Bhojpuri which also possess fully inflected imperative paradigms, Kanien'kéha third person imperatives can only express that the speaker wishes for a third party to do something, without literally commanding anyone to make it so. This optative-like reading is seen in (23) where the feminine-indefinite agreement indicates either a female or indefinite subject. Again, we have used an inexact English translation, this time using *may*, to signal an optative-like interpretation but it should be noted that Kanien'kéha speakers say that the utterance feels like other imperatives, suggesting it carries the same underlying force despite the variation in English translations.

(23) Iontahónhsatat!
io-atahonhsatat
FISGA-listen
'May she/someone listen!'

Crucially, the addressee plays no part in the interpretation of third person imperatives in Kanien'kéha. It is infelicitous to use a third person imperative like the one in (24) to command the addressee(s) to make the third person referent do something. Instead, the only appropriate use is one in which there is no expectation of an addressee (in fact, there doesn't even need to be an addressee present). This means that such imperatives can be

used when the addressee has never and will never interact with the third person subject.

(24) Ohnékanos rahnekì:ra!
ohnekanos ra-hnwekihra
water MSGA-drink
'May he drink water!'

a. ✗ Context: you and a friend are taking care of John. You want your friend to get John to drink water.

b. ✓ Context: you and John went out last night and he drank a lot. This morning, you're talking with a friend who's never met John. You don't know where John is this morning but you're worried about his hangover.

Along these lines, it is also possible to use third person imperatives when there is no possible way for anyone in the world, including the addressee, to make the described event come to pass. The examples in (25) describe events such as rain and sunrises which are outside the control of humans. Even if the speaker uttered these clauses in front of a listener, it would be odd to assume that the listener would be tasked with making rain fall or making the sun rise.

(25) a. Iokén:nor!
io-kennor
N.P-rain
'May it rain!'

b. Tkarahkwíneken'n!
t-ka-rahkw-ineken'n
CIS-N.A-sun-emerge
'May the sun rise!'

In this way, Kanien'kéha's third person imperatives, like its first person imperatives, share the same form and a similar force with second person imperatives but do not fit within a paradigm based on the second person imperative. After all, if this were the case, we would expect there to be some reading available in which the addressee could be tasked with making the third party subjects in the above examples carry out an action, but this is not the case. The range of imperative interpretations then diverges from previously documented non-second person imperatives which are typically analyzed as applying directive force to a speech act participant. However, in Kanien'kéha, the illocutionary effect of imperatives appears to be agnostic to the addressee and instead determined by the subject, with second person subject giving rise to commands, first person subjects giving rise to promises, and third person imperatives giving rise to wishes. The fact that each type of imperative is semantically distinct casts doubt on analyses in which the interpretation of first and third person imperatives is based on a model where second person imperatives are the norm.

5. Conclusion and implications

In this paper, we provided a preliminary description of imperative clauses in Kanien'kéha. We documented their unique syntactic form, showing that Kanien'kéha imperatives are true imperatives that pattern like other canonical imperatives cross-linguistically. However, we also showed that Kanien'kéha imperatives pattern *differently* than canonical imperatives in two important ways. First, they exhibit no restrictions on their subjects. Unlike the imperatives found in most work on the clause type, Kanien'kéha imperatives can have first, second, and third person subjects. Second, imperatives in Kanien'kéha are not all speech acts which involve the addressee. Unlike in other languages with third person imperatives, for instance, Kanien'kéha's third person imperatives can never be interpreted to command the listener. Only an optative-like interpretation is available.

We argue that these observations, which are found in other languages but rarely mentioned in the theoretical literature, need to be addressed. Past accounts of imperative semantics and restrictions on imperative subjects do not take into account imperative paradigms like Kanien'kéha's which do not exhibit subject restrictions and do not preference one type of imperatives—traditionally, second person imperatives—in their analyses. In fact, both of the two most prominent approaches fail to predict the Kanien'kéha facts.

Under the Modal Approach, most commonly associated with Kaufmann 2012, imperatives are said to have a covert modal operator (like *should*) that comes with a set of presuppositions triggering a performative use as a directive speech act. These presuppositions give rise to a decision problem for the addressee which is resolved by the imperative modal. While this alone might be able to account for the Kanien'kéha data, such approaches typically further propose the presence of a covert pronoun in the derivation whose person features require the subject to be interpreted as a quantifier over the set of addressees. If this were the case in Kanien'kéha, however, all imperatives would require the addressee to make something happen. However, first and third person imperatives do not do this.

Under the competing Dynamic Approach, associated with Portner 2004 and Zanuttini et al. 2012, imperatives update the discourse by imposing an ordering relation on the set of worlds compatible with the common ground (creating a To-do List). Subject restrictions arise as a result of a Jussive head in the derivation which comes with a person feature that requires it to be the addressee's (or in some unique cases, the speaker's) To-do List which is updated, resulting in a directive speech act. Again, this set-up struggles to align with the Kanien'kéha facts where no one's To-do List is targeted in third person imperatives. A semantics based on adding items to a To-do List is therefore irrelevant.

What the Kanien'kéha data point to then is the need for an alternative model of imperative semantics which is not based off of the assumption that most, if not all, imperatives are second person commands. This could be achieved by returning to a pragmatics-based approach wherein imperatives rank worlds in terms of desire but whose desire this is (speaker, addressee, third party, the world at large) is determined contextually. However, more research is needed to determine how exactly such a solution might be formalized.

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