

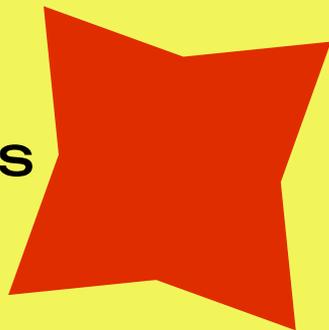
Niwakenehrakò:'on!

(or...how to exclaim in Kanien'kéha!)

Willie Myers

Iakwarihwí:saks

May 22, 2025



Roadmap!

1. **Why study surprise?!**
2. Different types of exclamations!
3. Grammatical surprise!
4. Takeaways!

Surprise in language!

Lots of things in life are surprising so it's no surprise that languages have many different ways to express...surprise.

Surprise in language!

Common ways to exclaim (aka express surprise):

1. **Wow!** (Vocabulary)
2. **John swims fast!** (Intonation)
3. **Boy does John swim fast!** (Construction)

Why study surprise?!

While expressing surprise is a natural and necessary part of speaking a language, grammars and textbooks don't often spend much time on it.

tó: how much? how many? For example:

Tó: ní:kon? 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:kon? How old are

you?



Also an exclamative expression, as in
(taking to oneself) “let me see!”

(from the 2024 Kanien'kéha/English Dictionary)

Why study surprise?!

In general, the expression of surprise, and other types of “emotional” language, are relatively under-documented, especially in non-European languages.

Why study surprise?!

In general, the expression of surprise, and other types of “emotional” language, are relatively under-documented, especially in non-European languages.



We should study expressive language more!

Project goals!

1. document as many different ways to exclaim in Kanien'kéha as possible!
2. investigate how surprise is encoded in the grammar of the language!

Roadmap

1. Why study surprise?!
2. **Exclaiming in Kanien'kéha!**
3. Grammatical surprise!
4. Takeaways!

Exclaiming in Kanien'kéha!

1. Intonation!
2. Interjections!
3. Expletives!
4. Infixation!
5. EMO + *tsi* constructions!
6. Partitive constructions!

Intonation!

Anything can be said in a surprised way.

Oh...

John rahnén:ies.

Oh!

John rahnén:ies!

Interjections!

Interjections = little words like English wow!

Kenh!

‘Really!’

Tó:!

‘My!’ or ‘Let’s see here!’

Interjections!

Interjections are often hard to translate since they express emotions.

Há:ke!

Á:ke!

Oh!

Nió:!

Niò:ts!

Wá: só:!

Thió:!

→ *Also, lots of community/individual variation!*

Expletives!

Expletives = swear words like English *damn!*

	Ótsta!	Ótkon!	Otkon'seráksen!
Literal:	'Fish scale!'	'Devil!'	'Bad devil!'
Functional:	'Shit!'	'Damn!'	'God damn!'

Expletives!

Expletives = swear words like English *damn!*

Oneshonrón:on!

Literal: ‘Resident of hell!’

Functional: ‘Damn!’

Ateneniáhrhon!

‘Stone giant!’

‘Damn!’

Expletives!

Again, these are often hard (impossible?) to translate exactly.

Keniátshia thia'karihwakénnia'te'!

Literal: ???

Functional: !?#?\$@!

Infixation!

Some expletives can be added in the middle of a word to amp up the emotion.

kí:ken kanónhsa

‘this house’

kí:ken k~~an~~eri’tanónhsa!

‘this f***in’ house!’

Rahnén:ies.

‘He’s tall.’

Ra~~w~~ha'ktserahnén:ies!

‘He’s f***in’ tall!’

EMO + tsi!

You can add emotional words like interjections and expletives to sentences, often with *tsi*.

Á:ke, ióhskats kí:ken oneró:kwa!

Á:ke tsi ióhskats kí:ken oneró:kwa!

‘My, this top is beautiful!’

Partitive constructions!

Adding the partitive prefix (usually *ni-*) to a verb expresses surprise as well.

Niíóhskats kík:ken oneró:kwa!

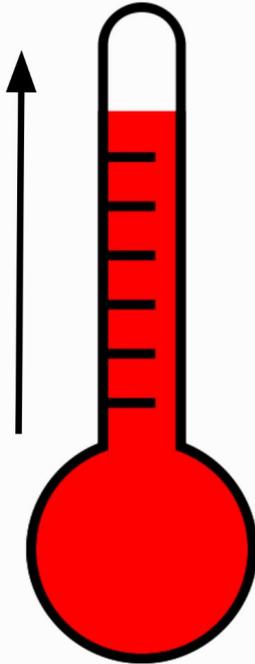
‘Boy is this top beautiful!’

Nihahnén:ies ne Kó:r!

‘How tall Paul is!’

Mix and match!

Different strategies can also be mixed together to emphasize the surprise.



Oneshonrón:on tsi nihanani'tahétken!

Oneshonrón:on tsi nihawha'ktsherahétken!

Oneshonrón:on tsi nihahétken!

Otkon'seráksen / ateniáhrhon tsi nihahétken!

Ótkon / ótsta tsi nihahétken!

Á:ke / nió / oh tsi nihahétken!

Á:ké / nió / oh nihahétken!

Tsi nihahétken!

Nihaheétken!

Rahétken!

Context: someone talking about their friend's new dog who is...very weird-looking.

Roadmap

1. Why study surprise?!
2. Exclaiming in Kanien'kéha!
- 3. Grammatical surprise!**
4. Takeaways!

Surprise in the grammar!

In the linguistic study of surprise, one common question is:

→ where in a sentence does surprise come from?

Surprise in the grammar!

Two different types of utterances:

1. **Exclamation** – surprise comes from the way the speaker produces the utterance

You have big eyes!

Surprise in the grammar!

Two different types of utterances:

2. **Exclamative** – surprise comes from the form (syntax) of the utterance

What big eyes you have!

Obligatory surprise!

Exclamatives can only be used when the speaker is **surprised**.

Exclamations can also be used in normal contexts.

Obligatory surprise!

Context: John runs every day. He always runs the same, normal distance at the same, normal speed. This morning, he ran his normal speed and distance.

John ran!

(exclamation)

???Boy did John run!

(exclamative)

Exclamativity!

Exclamativity = surprise that is **encoded** in the grammar.

Certain words and structures **inherently** express surprise.

English exclamatives!

1. What big eyes you have! (wh-word)
2. Boy do you have big eyes! (inversion)
3. The eyes you have! (nominal)

What about Kanien'kéha?!

Claim: out of all the strategies documented, only
partitive constructions **MUST** express surprise.

What about Kanien'kéha?!

Claim: out of all the strategies documented, only partitive constructions **MUST** express surprise.

Context: John eats a surprising amount of meat.

✓ **Ra'wá:raks!**

✓ **Niha'wá:raks!**

Context: John eats a normal amount of meat.

✓ **Ra'wá:raks!**

✗ **Niha'wá:raks!**

Why the partitive?!

The partitive shows up whenever you talk about *degree, amount, or extent* of something.

Áhsen nikanónhsake.

‘three houses’

Ken’ niwanónhsa’.

‘The house is this big.’

Tó: nihá:ti?

‘How many are they?’

Why the partitive?!

Exclamatives don't just express surprise; they express surprise at *degree, extent, amount*, etc.

Nihahnén:ies ne Max!

‘HOW tall Max is!’

Nihahétken!

‘HOW ugly the dog is!’

Na'tehskahrowá:nen's!

‘HOW big your eyes are!’

Roadmap

1. Why study surprise?!
2. Exclaiming in Kanien'kéha!
3. Grammatical surprise!
4. **Takeaways!**

Takeaways!

- Like other languages, Kanien'kéha has a lot of ways to express surprise (and other emotions).
- Notably, one of those ways OBLIGATORILY expresses surprise.

→ ***partitive + normal sentence = !***

Why does it matter?!

- Though there are many similarities across languages in expressing surprise, there are also major differences.
 - English surprise: wh-words and inversion
 - Kanien'kéha surprise: partitive
- Kanien'kéha has its own way to express surprise grammatically and it's connected to measurement!
- Translating exclamatives from English to Kanien'kéha directly leads you astray.

Why does it matter?!

- The fact that Kanien'kéha does not express surprise like European language is **cool** because most research on exclamatives has only looked at European languages which all favor these strategies.
- Looking at Kanien'kéha gives us a better picture of how surprise can be grammatically encoded across all human language.

Niá:wen!

- Konwaronhiá:wi Helen Norton, Katerí Deer, and Mary Onwá:ri Tekahawáhkwen McDonald
- Akwiratékha' Martin, Wíshe Mittelstaedt, and Arihwí:saks Colin Benedict
- Tsowén:te Cross, Terrance Gatchalian, Katya Morgunova, and Jessica Coon
- Rotinikonhrowánens
- Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center

Niá:wen!*

*It's possible that *niá:wen* is itself an exclamation!

- tsi **niiá:w**ens → 'the way it happens'
- **niiá:w**en → 'Boy how it has happened!'

It's even easier to see this in other Haudenosaunee languages.

Tiawenhk!

(Wendat)

ti-yaw-en-hk

PART-it-happen-HAB

'Boy is it happening!'