

Optional Past "Tenses" and cessation inferences in Kanien'kéha

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A typology of tense

Describing a typology of tenses has at least these two considerations:

- 1 the **inventory** of attested tense values
- 2 whether the language permits **optional** tense marking (and for which values)

A typology of tense

■ On the inventory of attested tense values

- ① Is there a DISCONTINUOUS PAST **distinct** from plain PAST tense? (Plungian and van der Auwera, 2006; Bochnak, 2016; Cable, 2017)

A typology of tense

■ On the inventory of attested tense values

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(2) Kuk'éiyeen

IPFV.good.weather.PST

'The weather was nice (but turned bad).' (Cable, 2017, 637)

Kanién'kéha Optional Past

Kanién'kéha has **two optional past suffixes**, which *prima facie* indicates support for the existence of a discontinuous past (as we will see).

- (3) wató:rats**kwe'**
w-atorat-s-**kwe'**
FZ.A-hunt-HAB-FOR.PST
'She was hunting.'
(Former Past *-(h)kwe'*)

- (4) rotshokwèn:**ne**.
ro-atshokw-en-**hne**
MSGP-smoke-STAT-REM.PAST
'He was smoking.'
(Remote Past *-hne'*)

Kanien'kéha Optional Past

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(Former Past *-(h)kwe'*)

(6) rotshokwèn:**ne**.
ro-atshokw-en-**hne**
MSGP-smoke-STAT-REM.PAST
'He was smoking.'
(Remote Past *-hne'*)

Given prior descriptions (Martin, 2023), these suffixes have the properties associated with discontinuous pasts: **a strong cessation inference**.

A preview of the results

- ① Is there a DISCONTINUOUS PAST **distinct** from plain PAST tense?

Re: question ①

A more detailed investigation into these suffixes shows that there is **no independent support for “discontinuous past”** as a distinct category of tense in Kanien'kéha

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- ① Is there a DISCONTINUOUS PAST **distinct** from plain PAST tense?

Re: question ①

A more detailed investigation into these suffixes shows that there is **no independent support for “discontinuous past”** as a distinct category of tense in Kanien'kéha

To see this, we will investigate:

- ② the nature/strength of the cessation inference
- ③ the distribution of each past suffix

A preview of the results

On ② the nature/strength of the cessation inference

The **Former Past** *-(h)kwe'* comes with a cessation **implicature**

The **Remote Past** *-hne'* comes with a cessation **entailment**

On ③ the distribution of each past suffix

The **Former Past** *-(h)kwe'* has a wider distribution (though not unrestricted), appearing on Habitual and Stative aspect verbs

The **Remote Past** *-hne'* only occurs on Stative aspect verbs describing right-unbounded eventualities.

A preview of the results

Overall upshot

I argue for the following analysis:

- ① The **Former Past** *-(h)kwe'* is a standard PAST tense.
- ② The **Remote Past** *-hne'* is not a tense at all; it adds a right-bound to lexically right-unbounded eventualities.

- 1 Kanien'kéha optional tense
- 2 Differentiating optional "tenses"
- 3 Towards a Formal Account
- 4 Conclusion

Kanien'kéha optional tense

Kanien'kéha

Situating **Kanien'kéha** (Mohawk):

- Spoken by the Kanien'kehá:ka people in Ontario, Quebec, and New York State
- by around 562 L1 speakers and 77 advanced L2 (DeCaire, 2023, 44)
- uncited examples come from elicitation sessions with 4 speakers

Kanien'kéha

Situating **Kanien'kéha** (Mohawk):

- “polysynthetic” (cf. Baker 1996; Mithun 2017, a.o.)
- obligatory aspectual marking
- two optional past suffixes

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The verb template:

- (8) a. argeement-[verb stem]-**ASPECT**-(**TENSE**)
b. wató:ratskwe'
w-[atorat]-**s-kwe'**
FZ.A-hunt-**HAB-FOR.PST**
'She was hunting.'

Kanien'kéha

Of the three aspects, **two are relevant for us** today.

These are the aspectual forms which have an **on-going episodic interpretation**¹:

- **Habitual** on-going episodic
- **Stative** on-going episodic
- **Punctual**, or the (past) perfective (I will set this aside here)

¹The on-going aspects have additional interpretations; I set these aside.

Interpretations of morphologically tenseless clauses

Generalization I

Morphologically tenseless clauses of **on-going** aspect verbs are interpretable with *either (a) present or (b) past reference*

(9) Morphologically Tenseless Clause with Habitual Aspect

a. **Wató:rats.**

w-atorat-s

FZ.A-hunt-HAB

'She is hunting.'

(Present on-going)

b. Oh na'kénhaton shà:kken'

Oh na'kénhaton sha'-k-ken-'

last.time

COIN-1SG>FZSG-see-PUNC

'When I saw her last, she was hunting.'

wató:rats.

w-atorat-s

FZ.A-hunt-HAB

(Past on-going)

Interpretations of morphologically tenseless clauses

Generalization I

Morphologically tenseless clauses of **on-going** aspect verbs are interpretable with *either (a) present or (b) past reference*

(10) Morphologically Tenseless Clause with Stative Aspect

- a. Shawátiš **rotshókwen.**
 Shawatis ro-atshokw-en
 John MSGP-smoke-STAT
 'John is smoking.' (Present on-going)
- b. Shawátiš shahí:ken' **rotshókwen.**
 Shawatis sh-a'-hi-ken-' ro-atshokw-en
 John COIN-FACT-1SG>MSG-see-PUNC MSGP-smoke-STAT
 'John was smoking when I saw him.' (Past on-going)

Two past suffixes

Kanien'kéha has two suffixes traditionally described as past:

(11) a. Wató:rats.
w-atorat-s
FZ.A-hunt-HAB
'She is/was hunting.'
(on-going episodic)

b. wató:ratskwe'
w-atorat-s-kwe'
FZ.A-hunt-HAB-FOR.PST
'She *is/was hunting.'
(Former Past *-(h)kwe'*)

(12) a. rotshókwen.
ro-atshokw-en
MSGP-smoke-STAT
'He is/was smoking.'
(on-going episodic)

b. rotshokwèn:ne.
ro-atshokw-en-hne
MSGP-smoke-STAT-REM.PAST
'He *is/was smoking.'
(Remote Past *-hne'*)

Interpretations of past-marked forms: *-hne'*

Generalization II

Past-marked forms (*-(h)kwe'* or *-hne'*) are obligatorily (absolute) past referring and **give rise to a cessation inference**

(13) **Past suffixes: Former Past *-(h)kwe'***

Ohna'kénhaton shà:kken'

wató:ratskwe'

Ohna'kénhaton sh-a'-k-ken-'

w-atorat-s-kwe'

last.time

COIN-FACT-1SGA-see-PUNC

FZ.A-hunt-HAB-FOR.PAST

'When I saw her last, she was hunting.'

⇒ She is not currently hunting.

Interpretations of past-marked forms: $-(h)kwe'$

Generalization II

Past-marked forms ($-(h)kwe'$ or $-hne'$) are obligatorily (absolute) past referring and **give rise to a cessation inference**

(14) **Past suffixes: Remote Past $-hne'$**

Sue rotiniakòn:**ne'**.

Sue roti-niak-on-**hne'**

Sue M.DU.P-marry-STAT-**REM.PAST**

'He had been married to Sue.'

⇒ They are no longer married.

Interpretations of past-marked forms: absolute past

Generalization II

Past-marked forms (*-(h)kwe'* or *-hne'*) are obligatorily (absolute) past referring and **give rise to a cessation inference**

These are further restricted to **absolute past** reference (i.e., no future perfect/past-in-the-future)

- (15) *Nó:nen ó:ia' ientsóserate' tewáhsen nikahiatonhserá:ke
 nonen oia ientsoserate' te-wahsen nikahiatonhsera-ke
 now next it.will.be.new.year DUPL-ten PRT-book-COUNT

(en)wakewennahnó:tahkwe'.

en-wake-wennahnot-a-hkwe'

FUT-1SGP-read-STAT-FOR.PST

Intended: 'By this time next year, I will have read 20 books.'

Interpretations of past-marked forms: absolute past

Generalization II

Past-marked forms (*-(h)kwe'* or *-hne'*) are obligatorily (absolute) past referring and **give rise to a cessation inference**

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- (16) *wísk mínit **enhotsokwèn:ne'**
 wísk mínit en-ro-atsokwen-**hne'**
 five minute FUT-MSGP-smoke-STAT-**REM.PST**
 Intended: 'In five minutes, he will finish smoking/have smoked.'

Interpretations of past-marked forms

Generalization II

Past-marked forms(*-(h)kwe'* or *-hne'*) are obligatorily (absolute) past referring and **give rise to a cessation inference**

Generalization II taken at face value suggests that both suffixes make the same semantic contribution

(see Ormston 1993; Baker and Travis 1997, 1998 for explicit analyses along these lines)

Interpretations of past-marked forms

Generalization II

Past-marked forms (*-(h)kwe'* or *-hne'*) are obligatorily (absolute) past referring and **give rise to a cessation inference**

My claim

The past suffixes have **distinct truth conditions**. They are empirically differentiable by:

- 1 the strength of the cessation inference
- 2 their distribution
- 3 their morphophonology

Differentiating optional "tenses"

Cessation inferences with (discontinuous) past tense

- Plungian and van der Auwera (2006) show that putative “discontinuous past tenses” convey that the event no longer holds at present.
 - They encode this in the **conventional semantic contribution** of the “discontinuous past” and so predict that these cessation inferences are **entailed**.
- Cable (2017) and Bochnak (2016) shows that for at least Tlingit and Washo, the cessation inference is defeasible and therefore argue it to be an **implicature**.

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I will show that:

- **Former Past** *-(h)kwe'* comes with a cessation implicature;
- **Remote Past** *-hne'* comes with a cessation entailment.

Cessation implicatures with the Former Past

The cessation inference arising with $-(h)kwe'$ is **defeasible**.

(17) Former past gives rise to cessation inference

Kahiatónhsera rowennahnó:t**ahkwe'**

kahiatonhsera ro-wennahnot-a-**hkwe'**

book MSGP-read-STAT-FOR.PST

'He was reading the book.'

⇒ He is not currently reading

Cessation implicatures with the Former Past

The cessation inference arising with $-(h)kwe'$ is **defeasible**.

(18) **Cancellation of inference via explicit denial and ignorance statement**

- a. Shontakatáweia'te rowennahnó:ta**hkwe'**
Shon-ta-k-ataweia't-e ro-wennahnot-a**hkwe'**
COIN-CIS.FACT-1SGA-enter-PUNC MSGP-read-STAT-**FOR.PST**
- tánon shé:kón rowennà:note' ó:nén'k
tanon' shekon ro-wennahnot-e' onen'k
and still MSGP-read-STAT right.now
'He was reading when I entered, and he is still reading right now.'
- b. ... nek tsi iah tewakateriéntare' tóka shé:kón rowennà:note'
... nek tsi iah te-wak-aterientar-e' toka shekon ro-wennahnot-e'
... but NEG NEG-1SGP-know-STAT if still MSGP-read-STAT
'He was reading when I entered, but I don't know if he's still reading.'

Cessation entailments with the Remote Past

The cessation inference arising with *-hne'* is **not defeasible**.

(19) **Remote Past cessation inference cannot be cancelled via explicit denial of cessation**

a. Shawátiš **rotshokwèn:ne**.

Shawatis ro-atshokw-en-*hne*

John MSGP-smoke-STAT-*REM.PAST*

'John was smoking.'

⇒ John is not currently smoking

b. #Shawátiš **rotshokwèn:ne**

Shawatis ro-atshokw-en-*hne*

John MSGP-smoke-STAT-*REM.PAST*

tánon' shé:kon rotshókwen.

tanon shekon ro-atshokw-en

and still MSGP-smoke-STAT

Intended: 'John was smoking and he is still smoking.'

Cessation entailments with the Remote Past

The cessation inference arising with *-hne'* is **not defeasible**.

(20) **No cancellation with explicit statement of ignorance**

a. Sue **rotiniakòn:ne'**.

Sue roti-niak-on-*hne'*

Sue M.DU.P-marry-STAT-**REM.PST**

He was married to Sue.'

⇒ they are not married anymore

b. #... nek tsi iah tesewakaterièn:tare' tóka' shé:kon

... nek tsi iah te-se-wak-aterien:tar-e' toka' shekon

... but NEG NEG-REP-1SG.P-know-PUNC if still

rotiniá:ken

roti-niak-en

M.DU.P-marry-STAT

Intended: '... but I don't know if they're still married.'

Cessation entailments summary

Generalization III

Past-marked on-going-aspect verbs come with a cessation

- implicature, with the Former Past *-(h)kwe'*
- entailment, with the Remote Past *-hne'*

Cessation inferences

The empirical picture seems to provide support for the view in Plungian and van der Auwera (2006) that some past tenses (like *-hne'*) **entail cessation**.

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However, I will show that this is too hasty a conclusion:

- Former Past *-(h)kwe'* has a wide (but not unrestricted) distribution, as expected of a tense suffix
- Remote Past *-hne'* is much more restricted in its distribution and, I argue, does not convey tense.

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I will argue:

- the entailment with can be derived without directly encoding tense-like temporal anteriority

Syntactic distribution

While descriptions typically claim that the past suffixes are aspectually restricted, this does not capture the full picture.

- The **Former Past** *-(h)kwe'* occurs:
 - productively on **Habitual aspect verbs**
 - on **a subset of verb roots in the Stative aspect**
- The **Remote Past** *-hne'* is restricted
 - to **a subset of verb roots in the Stative aspect**

Where a verb root permits both suffixes, there are differences in interpretation (see Appendix).

Here, I will focus on the verb roots **where the suffixes are in complementary distribution**.

Syntactic distribution

Where the **Remote Past -hne'** is impossible with the Stative aspect (b), the **Former Past -(h)kwe'** is used (c).

- (21) a. leksà:'a teiakonniáhkwen.
 ieksa'a te-iako-nnoniahkw-en
 child DUPL-FI.P-dance-STAT
 'The child is/was dancing'
- b. *leksà:'a teiakonnoniahkwèn:**ne'**
 ieksa'a te-iako-nnoniahkw-en-**hne**
 child DUPL-FI.P-dance-STAT-**REM.PST**
 Intended: 'The child was dancing.'
- c. leksà:'a teiakonnoniahkwen**hkwe'**
 ieksa'a te-iako-nnoniahkw-en-**hkwe'**
 child DUPL-FI.P-dance-STAT-**FOR.PST**
 'The child was dancing.'

Syntactic distribution

Where the **Remote Past -hne'** is impossible with the Stative aspect (b), the **Former Past -(h)kwe'** is used (c).

- (22) a. rowennà:note'
ro-wennahnot-e'
MSGP-read-STAT
'He is/was reading.'
- b. *rowennà:note**hne'**
ro-wennahnot-e-**hne'**
MSGP-read-STAT-**REM.PST**
Intended: 'He was reading.'
- c. rowannahnóta**hkwe'**
ro-wennahnot-a-**hkwe'**
MSGP-read-STAT-**FOR.PST**
'He was reading.'

Remote Past *-hne'* distribution

Proposal

Remote Past forms are restricted to verbs whose event descriptions **do not encode an endpoint.**

Examples of such predicates include:

- number predicates
- temperature predicates
- evaluative predicates
- notionally permanent or difficult-to-change properties/results

Remote Past *-hne'* distribution

Proposal

Remote Past forms are restricted to verbs whose event descriptions **do not encode an endpoint.**

(23) Number predicates

áhsen nikontíhne' akohsá:tens

ahsen ni-konti-hne akohsatens

three PRT-be.number-REM.PST horse

ronáhskwaientakwe'

ro-nahskwaient-a-hkwe'

MSGP-have.horse-STAT-FOR.PST

'He had three horses.' (The number is different now).

Remote Past *-hne'* distribution

Proposal

Remote Past forms are restricted to verbs whose event descriptions **do not encode an endpoint.**

(24) Temperature predicates

lowistóhne ken shiiohrhón'ke

io-wisto-hne ken shi-io-hrhon'ke

N.P-be.cold.STAT-REM.PST Q COIN-N.P-be.morning

'Was it cold (weather) this morning?' (It is not cold currently)

Remote Past *-hne'* distribution

Proposal

Remote Past forms are restricted to verbs whose event descriptions **do not encode an endpoint.**

(25) Evaluative predicates

É:so tsi **iaontonna'tòn:ne'**

eso tsi ia-ontonna't-on-**hne'**

this that N.P-be.boring-STAT-**REM.PST**

'It was boring.' (but was now re-written to be less so, e.g.)

Remote Past *-hne'* distribution

Proposal

Remote Past forms are restricted to verbs whose event descriptions **do not encode an endpoint.**

- (25) **Notionally difficult-to-change properties/results**
- | | | |
|---|----|----------------|
| wakati:n:ne | ne | akehnhotónkwa. |
| wak-ati-on-hne | ne | ake-hnhotonkwa |
| 1SGP-lose-STAT-REM.PST | NE | 1SGP-keys |
| 'I lost my keys.' (and have found them now) | | |

Towards a Formal Account

The main claim: (un)boundedness

(Right) unboundedness

The property I claim to underlie the distribution of the **Remote Past -hne'** is **right-unboundedness** defined in (26), following the temporal profile of statives proposed in Altshuler and Schwarzchild (2013) (see also Cable 2017).

(26) **An (untensed stative) verb describes a right-unbounded eventuality φ iff:**

- a. φ is true at a moment m ,
- b. for any moment m'' such that $m < m''$, φ is true (right-unboundedness)

Unboundedness in embedded contexts

Independent support for right-unboundedness at play in Kanién'kéha comes from the obligatory marking for back-shifting in embedded contexts.

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Generalization IV

Predicates marking anteriority with the *Remote Past -hne'* **require** it to be back-shifted in embedded contexts

Unboundedness in embedded contexts: $-(h)kwe'$ optional

Generalization IV

Predicates marking anteriority with the **Remote Past $-hne'$** require it to be back-shifted in embedded contexts.

(27) **Context for backshifted interpretation:** *Katya didn't show up for a get-together last week. Willie told me yesterday why.*

Willie wahèn:ron'

Willie wa-ha-ihron-'

Willie FACT-MSGA-say-PUNC

tiahia'khera tsi náhe Katya Aquatic Centre kiontá:wens(**kwe'**)

tiahia'khera tsi náhe Katya Aquatic Centre t-ie-atawen-s**kwe'**

last.week

Katya

CIS-FI.A-swim-HAB-FOR.PAST

'Willie said that Katya was swimming at the Aquatic Centre last week.'

Unboundedness in embedded contexts: *-hne'* obligatory

Generalization IV

Predicates marking anteriority with the **Remote Past *-hne'*** require it to be back-shifted in embedded contexts.

- (28) **Context for backshifted reading:** *I come into the room and it's very smoky. No one is currently smoking, but John told me why there's so much smoke in the air.*

Shawátis wahèn:ron'

Kó:r rotshokwèn#(:ne).

Shawatis wa-ha-ihron-'

Kor ro-atshokw-en-hne

John FACT-MSGA-say-PUNC Paul MSGP-smoke-STAT-REM.PAST

'John said that Paul was smoking.'

Neutralizing tense contrasts

I illustrate how the cessation inferences are computed in each case, and account for the difference in strength of the inference as such:

- The inference is defeasible when alternative interpretations are not independently ruled out.
- The inference is non-defeasible if alternatives interpretations are independently ruled out (i.e., by right-unboundedness of the predicate).

Analytical Assumptions

To derive the cessation inferences, I will assume the following tense values, with the following interpretational possibilities:

- Non-future tense (choice of RT)
[NFUT] $\Leftrightarrow \emptyset$, past presupposition: $t < t^*$, *or*
[NFUT] $\Leftrightarrow \emptyset$, present presupposition: $t = t^*$
- Optional past tense
[PST] $\Leftrightarrow -(h)kwe'$, past presupposition: $t < t^*$

Analytical Assumptions

To derive the cessation inferences, I will assume the following tense values, with the following interpretational possibilities:

- Non-future tense (choice of RT)

[NFUT] $\Leftrightarrow \emptyset$, past presupposition: $t < t^*$, *or*

[NFUT] $\Leftrightarrow \emptyset$, present presupposition: $t = t^*$

- Optional past tense

[PST] $\Leftrightarrow -(h)kwe'$, past presupposition: $t < t^*$

I will abbreviate the key condition from lexical (un)boundedness as follows:

- bounded: $\forall m, P(e)(m)$

- unbounded: $\exists m'. m < m' P(e)(m)$ and $\neg P(e)(m')$

Neutralizing tense contrasts

To illustrate, first consider tenseless clauses. Specifically, consider the Event Time/Utterance Time relation (final column):

Lexical semantics	Aspect	Tense	On-going at UT
bounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t < t^*$	ceased <i>or</i> on-going
bounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t = t^*$	on-going
unbounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t < t^*$	on-going
unbounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t = t^*$	on-going

Regardless of the choice of RT, use of NFUT tense with unbounded predicates entails on-going at UT; i.e., neutralizes the effects of RT on on-goingness

Deriving cessation implicatures

Consider now $-(h)kwe'$ marked forms. Assuming Former Past $-(h)kwe'$ is PST tense.

Lexical semantics	Aspect	Tense	On-going at UT
bounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t < t^*$	ceased <i>or</i> on-going
bounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t = t^*$	on-going
bounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	PST: $t < t^*$	cessation inferred

- ① A knowledgeable authority choosing PST conveys that the present reading of NFUT (line 2) is not assertable (cf. Cable 2017).
- ② The overlapping meaning w.r.t. on-goingness with the past reading of NFUT (line 1) is inferred to be false.

Deriving cessation entailments

With unbounded eventualities, use of a dedicated PST tense does not change the on-goingness entailment:

Lexical semantics	Aspect	Tense	On-going at UT
unbounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t < t^*$	on-going
unbounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	NFUT: $t = t^*$	on-going
unbounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	PST: $t < t^*$	on-going

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unbounded	$\tau(e) \subseteq t$	PST: $t < t^*$	on-going

What we want is to derive the following truth conditions:

- ① introduce a right-bound to obviate the on-goingness entailment
- ② ensure the absolute pastness of this right-bound

Deriving cessation entailments

- ① Firstly, I propose the **Remote Past** *-hne* derives right-bounded eventualities.

Deriving cessation entailments

① Firstly, I propose the **Remote Past -hne** derives right-bounded eventualities.

② To ensure the absolute pastness of this right-bound, there are two ways:

H1 allow for **Remote Past -hne** to also encode strict anteriority as a PST tense (discont. past analysis)

H2 propose that the **Remote Past -hne** encodes anteriority in some other way (as a modal?) (no discont. past analysis)

I leave spelling out and adjudicating between these options for future.

Conclusion

Take aways

Empirically

I introduced a novel observation regarding the Kanien'kéha past suffixes

- Former Past *-(h)kwe'* comes with a cessation implicature;
- Remote Past *-hne'* comes with a cessation entailment.

Analytically and Theoretically

I argued that

- The distribution of Kanien'kéha's Remote Past *-hne'* is restricted to right-bounded eventualities
- This distribution complicates a straightforward discontinuous past analysis

Thank you

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Distributional overlap and semantic differences

- (29) a. lowistóhne'
io-wisto-hne'
N.P-be.cold.STAT-REM.PST
'It was cold (weather).'
⇒ It is no longer cold.
- b. Kewistós kwe'
ke-wisto-s-kwe'
1SGA-be.cold-HAB-FOR.PST
'I was cold.'
⇒ I am no longer cold.

- (30) a. tkaieríhne'
t-ka-ieri-hne'
CIS-N.A-correct.STAT-REM.PST
'It was correct.'
⇒ It is no longer correct.
- b. tkaiérihkwe'
t-ka-ieri-hkwe'
CIS-N.A-correct.STAT-FOR.PST
'It was correct.'
⇒ It is no longer correct.

Endpoint Actuality

- (31) a. Wísk mínit enhahsa' tsi rotshókwen
 wisk minit en-ra-hs-a' tsi ro-atshokw-en
 five minute FUT-MSGP-finish-PUNC that MSGP-smoke-STAT
 'In five minutes, he will finish smoking.'
- b. *wísk mínit enhotsokwèn:ne'
 wísk mínit en-ro-atsokwen-hne'
 five minute FUT-MSGP-smoke-STAT-REM.PST
 Intended: 'In five minutes, he will finish smoking/have smoked.'