"Authentic" L2 revitalization in Kanien'kéha: The case of idioms[1]

Martin RENARD[2]

University of Toronto

EDITOR:

Luiz Amaral (UMass Amherst)

ABSTRACT

Kanien'kéha (Mohawk), a Northern Iroquoian language with fewer than 700 speakers, experienced a break in intergenerational transmission during the 20th century, due to the Canadian residential school system. This has prompted revitalization efforts since the 1970s, particularly adult immersion programs aimed at creating new L2 speakers who then raise L1 children. While this strategy has been effective, achieving "authentic" speech comparable to L1 speakers remains challenging, especially in areas like idioms, which are essential for humour and expressive richness, but difficult for L2 learners to master due to their semantic opacity and context-specific use. Through focus groups with Kanien'kéha language workers, this study shows that idioms are central to preserving the language's authenticity, and argues that overcoming these challenges requires ongoing exposure to L1 speech. The project contributes both to the theory of language revitalization, where

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idioms remain underexplored, and to the practical goals of Kanien'kéha communities by highlighting specific obstacles and solutions to this challenge within a collaborative and community-centered research model.

RÉSUMÉ

Le kanien'kéha (mohawk), une langue iroquoienne du nord parlée par moins de 700 locuteurs, a connu une rupture de transmission intergénérationnelle au 20e siècle en raison du système canadien des pensionnats. Depuis les années 1970, cela a entraîné divers efforts de revitalisation, en particulier des programmes d'immersion pour adultes visant à former de nouveaux locuteurs L2 capables d'élever des enfants L1. Bien que cette stratégie ait porté ses fruits, atteindre un niveau d'expression « authentique » comparable à celui des locuteurs natifs reste difficile, notamment pour la maîtrise des idiomes ; qui sont essentiels à l'humour et à la richesse expressive, mais ardus à acquérir en raison de leur opacité sémantique et de leur usage contextuel. À travers des groupes de discussion avec des spécialistes de la langue kanien'kéha, cette étude montre que les idiomes sont centraux pour préserver l'authenticité de la langue et souligne que leur appropriation nécessite une exposition continue au discours de locuteurs natifs. Ce projet contribue à la fois à la théorie de la revitalisation linguistique, où les idiomes demeurent peu étudiés, et aux objectifs pratiques des communautés kanien'kéha en mettant en lumière des obstacles précis et des solutions, dans un cadre de recherche collaboratif et centré sur la communauté.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) is a Northern Iroquoian language spoken by the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) people in eight communities across Ontario, Quebec, and New York State (Mithun, 1999, p. 424). Like many other Indigenous languages of North America, it is severely endangered: according to DeCaire (2023), the number of speakers has been steadily decreasing for a few generations, mostly due to the abrupt breakage in inter-generational transmission in the mid-20th century, so that there are today only around 700 active users of the language remaining, counting both L1 and L2 speakers. This has led to the creation of various revitalization projects since the late 1970s. In particular, adult immersion programs target young adults in order to create new L2 speakers who can in turn raise L1 children, thereby re-establishing inter-generational transmission; this strategy is called L2 revitalization. However, these immersion programs face tremendous challenges: if it is these new L2 speakers who will ultimately lead the revitalization of the language by raising L1 children, how can we ensure that they acquire and transmit it under its "authentic" form (i.e., as spoken by fluent L1 elders, for now; see

Section 2)? Indeed, we often find a significant proficiency gap between L1 and L2 speakers: how can we bridge it to guarantee that these new L1 children will themselves speak "authentically"?

This issue of the lower "authenticity" of L2 speech, exacerbated by the fact that L2 speakers constitute the key to the current Kanien'kéha revitalization strategy, affects every level of the language, from pronunciation and prosody to discourse patterns (Mithun, 2021, p. 737). Due to the massive scope of this topic, it thus seems preferable to focus on one specific case study, and use it as a gateway to a better understanding of this larger issue. One component of "authentic" Kanien'kéha that is often lacking from L2 speech, and that is well-suited to this purpose because it is easy to bring to the consciousness of speakers during research, is idiomaticity: it seems difficult for L2 learners of Kanien'kéha to acquire and appropriately use language and culture-specific non-compositional idiomatic expressions. Due to the polysynthetic structure of the language, most Kanien'kéha idioms are single verbs featuring noun incorporation, and accordingly most of our examples will be of this type; although idiomaticity in Kanien'kéha manifests itself on different levels, as in all languages.

Specifically, we will address the following question: what are the roles and implications of idiomatic expressions in the re-establishment of inter-generational transmission in Kanien'kéha (through the creation in adult immersion programs of "authentic" L2 speakers raising L1 children)? Four specific questions follow from this issue: (i) What is the importance and function of idiomatic expressions in speech? (i.e., the question of *functionality*); (ii) What role do idiomatic expressions play in the construction of "authentic" Kanien'kéha? (i.e., the question of *authenticity*); (iii) What challenges do idiomatic expressions present to L2 learners? (i.e., the question of *learnability*); and (iv) How can we improve the L2 acquisition of idiomatic expressions? (i.e., the question of *pedagogy*).

The role of idiomaticity in L2 Indigenous language revitalization, as well as its connection to the issue of authenticity, have never been directly considered, and this study is in part an attempt at filling this gap. Beside its scholarly value, my hope is that this work may both clarify the issues at play and suggest potential solutions to them, so as to contribute to language revitalization. To support the revitalization of Kanien'kéha more concretely, I have also prepared a plain-language summary of actionable findings, which should hopefully be helpful to Kanien'kéha language workers. Note that, although this research is not strictly speaking community-centred, as the research questions still emanate from outside the communities themselves, it is certainly community-engaged, as I have conducted focus groups with Kanien'kéha speakers coming from various communities and language backgrounds in order to address these questions. In this sense, this work is a practical application of Cameron et al.'s (1992) "Empowerment Model" of collaborative linguistic work, that is work done not only "on" or "about", but also "for" and "with" communities.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides background information concerning the revitalization of Kanien'kéha, and discusses the key but controversial concept of "authenticity". Section 3 gives an overview of idiomatic expressions in Kanien'kéha. Section 4 then discusses the results of the focus groups, which constitutes the heart of the study. This feeds into a wider debate between two alternative approaches to L2 revitalization in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2. KANIEN'KÉHA REVITALIZATION AND AUTHENTICITY

Language endangerment is a global phenomenon (Hinton et al., 2018), which has been on the mind of many language workers and researchers since at least Krauss' seminal 1992 article. It is particularly widespread in areas historically colonized by Europeans, and the Northern Iroquoian language family located in northeastern North America epitomizes this phenomenon. Kanien'kéha, one of the major languages in this family, is spoken in the six main communities of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation: Ohswé:ken (Six Nations of the Grand River), Kenhtè:ke (Tyendinaga), and Wáhta in Ontario; Kahnawà:ke and Kanehsatà:ke in Québec; and Akwesáhsne, which straddles the borders between these two Canadian provinces and New York State (Mithun, 1999, p. 424). DeCaire (2023, p. 44) has compiled alarming figures concerning the vitality of Kanien'kéha, based on an updated version of Green's (2018) findings: there remain only 665 speakers (1.2% of the total Kanien'kehá:ka population), including 562 L1 elders, 77 highly proficient L2 adults, and 26 L1 children of L2 parents. The elder L1 population is thus small, and it is decreasing faster than the rate at which new L2 speakers are being created, as most elder L1s are by definition elderly. Given these statistics, Kanien'kéha is considered very low on most scales of language endangerment (e.g., "Stage 8" on Fishman's (1991) GIDS, "Moribund" on Lewis and Simons' (2010) EGIDS, and "Severely Endangered" on the UNESCO scale); although those metrics do not take into account the growing number of highly proficient L2 speakers. The main reason for the endangerment of Kanien'kéha was an abrupt breakage in inter-generational transmission in the mid-20th century, caused by the Canadian residential school system (Bilash, 2011).

As is the case in many language endangerment contexts, Kanien'kehá:ka communities wish to revitalize their language, which they see as a crucial component of their identity and culture. Because elder L1s are past child-bearing age and are disappearing rapidly, the strategy that has been selected in order to reach this objective is *L2 revitalization*: create young adult L2 speakers, who can in turn raise "new" L1 children, thereby re-establishing inter-generational transmission[3]. This has led to the development of many revitalization projects since the late 1970s (Gomashie 2019), but the most impactful initiatives have arguably been adult immersion programs. These are programs of language instruction in which learners are taught full-time directly in the target language, in order to provide them

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[3] Unless otherwise stated, "L1" should henceforth be understood as referring to "elder" L1s rather than "new" L1s.

with continuous exposure to it and opportunities to use it over extended periods of time (I. Maracle, 2001, 2002). There are now five Kanien'kéha adult immersion programs: Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa in Ohswé:ken, which is well-known for its use of the "Root-Word Method" (Green and O. Maracle, 2018; Renard, 2022); Kanien'kéha Ratiwennahní:rats in Kahnawà:ke; Ratiwennenhá:wi in Kanehsatà:ke; Shatiwennakará:tats in Tyendinaga; and Á:se Tsitewá:ton in Akwesáhsne.

Immersion programs encounter serious obstacles, however, as mentioned in Section 1: how can we ensure that L2 learners acquire and transmit "authentic" (i.e., L1-like; but see below) Kanien'kéha, assuming that this is the target of revitalization efforts? The problem is that L2 learners coming out of these immersion programs often lack an "extra layer" of proficiency relative to native speakers, which may contain things such as L1-like prosodic and discourse patterns (Mithun, 2021, p. 737), as well as, crucially for our purposes, idiomatic expressions. As we will see, this might be due to the focus on grammatical correctness in many immersion programs, a lack of sufficient exposure to L1 speech, or influence from English, which is the L1 of virtually all L2 learners. The point is that, if it is these new L2 speakers, rather than L1 speakers, who will lead the revitalization of the language by transmitting it to their children, it is crucial that they maintain a certain degree of authenticity and avoid excessive influence from English, so that the new generation of L1 speakers inherits an authentic version of the language. Idioms thus belong to the larger issue of L2 authenticity, which all immersion programs have to contend with, and it is my hope that this case study will shed light on this broader phenomenon.

The notion of "authenticity" is thus crucial to this paper, and must be discussed in more detail before moving on. Although no participant explicitly stated this in the focus groups, the idea that authentic Kanien'kéha speech corresponds to the speech patterns of fluent L1 elders underlies most of their remarks (see Section 4). I will therefore assume this understanding of authentic Kanien'kéha as L1 speech throughout, as it also aligns with the opinions of many other Kanien'kéha language workers with whom the author has discussed this issue (the only exception to this definition is an isolated framing of "authenticity" as a more subjective concept by one of the participants; see quote 18). Note that equating "authentic Kanien'kéha" with the speech of L1 speakers does not mean that the language is bound to remain "stuck in the past". Kanien'kéha language workers are very aware of the fact that a language must be allowed to change and reflect its users' contemporary communicative needs in order to remain alive (e.g., they frequently develop new lexical items for new concepts).

It is also clear from the participants' contributions, as well as from conversations that the author has had with many Kanien'kéha language workers, that this "authentic" Kanien'kéha (i.e., L1 speech) is the goal of all Kanien'kéha revitalization efforts. This makes sense: Kanien'kehá:ka communities wish to maximize the "authenticity" (i.e., L1-likeness) of the Kanien'kéha variety which will eventually become stabilized as the outcome of revitalization, and to minimize language change through contact

with colonial languages. Indeed, any English interference in the speech of the new L2 speakers leading L2 revitalization risks becoming fixed in the language acquired as an L1 by their children, once there are no L1 elders left to "correct" these "deviations". The language goal of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is thus strikingly at odds with that of conventional L2 curricula for non-endangered languages, which is often mere communicative competence rather than "sounding authentic", as authenticity is maintained by the large L1 population in the homeland of the language anyway (DeCaire p.c.).

Beyond the Kanien'kéha context, the issue of authenticity is a major one in the field of Indigenous language revitalization (e.g., Hinton and Ahlers, 1999). An important point is that "authenticity" is by nature a relative concept, whose meaning is not necessarily stable across contexts, but is decided by each language community. For example, while Kanien'kehá:ka communities seem to largely equate authenticity with the speech of L1 speakers, insofar as it remains (mostly) unaffected by the influence of colonial languages, Modern Hebrew contains many Indo-European influences due to the different L1s of its first generation of L2 speakers, and yet it is considered by most as "authentic" rather than being dismissed as "inauthentic" (Zuckermann 2020).

Another key point is that "authenticity" can sometimes be a harmful concept, if it is used as an assessment criterion to judge the speech of L2 learners of a language, or as a way to legitimize only one specific variety of a language (e.g., that of L1 elders) to the detriment of all others. I obviously do not aim to use this concept in this way at all, and have the utmost respect for all the work and dedication of L2 Kanien'kéha learners, in spite of the significant challenges facing them. Their L2 variety is as valid as any other form of Kanien'kéha; it just happens to differ from their own revitalization goals. Thus, I am using the concept of "authenticity" in this work only as a useful way to conceptualize the goal of the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement, and by extension as a basis to characterize the key obstacle that it now faces; namely, the proficiency gap between L1 and L2 speakers. Moreover, it seems acceptable to use this term given that it is sometimes used by Kanien'kéha language workers themselves, including in conversations with the author. However, because of the issues associated with this term, mentions of "authenticity" in this work should be read as marked with scare quotes, as we have mostly done so far; but these are not systematically included below for the sake of readability.

3. IDIOMATICITY IN KANIEN'KÉHA

The concept of idiomaticity is ambiguous between two distinct interpretations, which are rarely explicitly distinguished. On the one hand, "idiomaticity" can be a property of specific expressions which happen to be synchronically non-compositional and semantically opaque. Let us label this first sense "phrasal idiomaticity". By definition, so-called "idioms" (e.g., *kick the bucket*) epitomize this idea of phrasal idiomaticity. On the other hand, "idiomaticity" can be a property of any utterance perceived as the "normal" or "unmarked" way of using a particular linguistic variety in a particular context (e.g., in

English, *I woke up at 7 am* is an idiomatic way of expressing the idea that I woke up at 7 am, whereas *I terminated my daily sleeping period at 7 am* usually is not, unless the context is similarly marked in some way). We may call this second sense "expressive idiomaticity". Maintaining a clear distinction between these two senses is crucial, as confusing one with the other risks blurring the distinction between two analytic levels: phrasal idiomaticity is a property of specific entries in speakers' mental lexicon, independently of language use; expressive idiomaticity is a property of specific instances of language use in context. A phrasally idiomatic expression may be used in a completely expressively non-idiomatic manner if it is unadapted to the utterance context, for instance.

This work focuses on the first type of phrasal idiomaticity, partly because speakers are more easily consciously aware of it (expressions whose actual meaning diverges from their literal meaning understandably stand out to speakers more than "the normal way of speaking"), which facilitates research. The primary locus of phrasal idiomaticity in Kanien'kéha is noun incorporation (i.e., incorporation of a nominal root inside a verbal complex; NI) (Bonvillain, 1989), which is unsurprising given the high productivity of this morphosyntactic process within the polysynthetic structure of the language. A typical example of an idiomatic expression involving NI is given below:

(1) Idiomatic NI construction (Brant, 2017)[4]

tewakatene'konhrekstha'tsheriià:kon

te-wak-at-ne'konhrekstha'tsher-iia'k-on

DUP-1SG.PAT-SRFL-hammer-break-STAT[5]

'I am broke' (literally 'my hammer is broken into two pieces')

This NI form is clearly idiomatic, in the sense that the mapping between its literal and actual meanings is fully non-compositional. Given that these NI expressions constitute the bulk of the Kanien'kéha idiom inventory, most of the examples discussed in this work are of this type; but it is important to note that idiomaticity is found at the phrasal level as well (e.g., *wa'otsì:iohske' nakhnà:ta* 'I am broke', literally 'my purse became weak', without NI), among others (e.g., discourse particle collocations).

Idioms involving NI typically arise when an originally compositional structure starts being routinely used, and accordingly becomes lexicalized as a single indecomposable verbal stem. According to Mithun (2011, p. 578), "[o]nce they [NI constructions] have become lexicalized, they are continually being extended to new contexts, and their meanings can shift accordingly, without regard to their original components", therefore potentially yielding a non-compositional and hence idiomatic

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[4] In all examples, the modern orthographic conventions of the Eastern Kanien'kéha dialect are respected, except in forms produced directly in the Western or Central variety. The spelling system is largely phonemic, and relatively straightforward: all symbols have standard IPA values, except for <'> which marks glottal stops [ʔ], and <en> and <on> which mark the nasal vowels [ẽ] and [ũ] respectively. The Eastern orthography differs from the Western one mostly in representing the yod glide [j] as <i> rather than <y> (e.g., Eastern <Kanien'kéha> vs Western <Kanyen'kéha>). Differences with the Central variety are irrelevant for our purposes. The standard Leipzig Glossing Rules are respected throughout, and the following abbreviations are used: > = transitive pronoun; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; AGT = agent; AL = alienable; APPL = applicative; CAUS = causative; CLOC = cislocative; CNTR = contrastive; DUP = duplicative; FAC = factual; HAB = habitual; INDEF = indefinite; JOIN = joiner vowel; M = masculine; NMZ = nominalizer; NSF = nominal suffix; PAT = patient; PL = plural; POSS = possessive; PRP = purposive; PST = past; PUNC = punctual; SG = singular; SRFL = semi-reflexive; STAT = stative; and TLOC = translocative.

[5] The element glossed as 'hammer' is actually a lexicalized deverbal incorporated nominal stem with its own complex internal structure composed of several morphemes (-ne-konhrek-st-ha-'tsher- ; SRFL-strike-CAUS-HAB-NMZ); but this is not directly relevant here. This is an example of a larger problem in Kanien'kéha: the complex verbal morphology can make it difficult to know when to stop breaking down forms. Throughout, I only do it as far as it seems relevant.

expression. These semantic shifts, and the idioms they result in, are often metaphorical (Bonvillain, 1989), in Lakoff's (1980) sense of understanding an abstract concept in terms of a more concrete one (e.g., *tewakatonhontsó:ni* 'I want', literally 'I benefit from the land'). Many idiomatic expressions in Kanien'kéha are also examples of "associated action frame metonymies" (Ahlers, 1996): a specific aspect of the "action frame" (i.e., the canonical cognitive representation of the context against which an object is understood, typically reified as the set of the "actions" this object can engage in) associated with an object is used to refer to that object as a whole (e.g., *kenheión:taks* 'vulture', literally 'it eats the dead'). These idioms are usually understood as revealing some culturally significant value (e.g., *tewakatonhontsó:ni* likely arose due to the cultural importance of land and agriculture for subsistence), or reflecting the historical context of their formation. Thus, in 1, *tewakatene'konhrekstha'tsheriià:kon* 'I am broke' (literally 'my hammer is broken into two pieces') probably comes from the late 19th or early 20th century, periods during which professions such as carpentry and smithing were still common, so that breaking one's hammer would make one unable to work and earn money (Brant p.c.).

Below are some more examples of Kanien'kéha idiomatic expressions, in order to give a sense of their diversity and complexity. Most come from a list compiled by Tahohtharátye Brant (2017):

(2) Idiomatic expressions (Brant, 2017)

a. *iahatsí:renhte'*
   i-a-ra-tsir-enht-e'
   TLOC-FAC-3SG.M.AGT-fire-drop-PUNC
   'he made matters worse' (literally 'he dropped fire')

b. *thotiá:ro'kte*
   t-ro-at-iar-o'kt-e
   CLOC-3SG.M.PAT-SRFL-bag-miss-STAT
   'he is dumb' (literally 'he is missing a bag')

c. *tehotshinétston*
   te-ro-at-hsin-e-tst-on
   DUP-3SG.M.PAT-SRFL-leg-be.long-CAUS-STAT
   'he is bossy' (literally 'he has lengthened his legs')

d. *tehononhwarawénrie*

te-ro-nonhwar-a-wenrie-Ø

DUP-3SG.M.PAT-brain-JOIN-stir-STAT

'he is crazy' (literally 'his brain is stirred')

The expressions in 2 are clear cases of phrasal idiomaticity, in the sense that their meaning cannot be compositionally derived from the meaning of their atomic components.

Crucially, we do not find in the domain of NI a binary opposition between fully transparent and fully idioms, but rather a continuum between these two extremes (Mithun, 2011, p. 577–578), with more compositional expressions on one end (e.g., *wakká:raien* ; wak-kar-a-ien-Ø ; 1SG.PAT-story-JOIN-have-STAT ; 'I have a story'), and more opaque ones on the other (e.g., the examples in 2 above). Most NI idioms are located somewhere along this continuum in-between these two extremes, in that "[their] original semantic basis […] can be discerned after the fact, but [their] meaning could not be predicted precisely" (e.g., *wahaterennaiénhna'* 'he went to church', literally 'he went to lay down his songs') (ibid.). The idea that idiomatic expressions are not all equally non-compositional, but are actually so to different extents, is in line with Nunberg et al.'s (1994) suggestion that we should distinguish between "idiomatically combining expressions" (e.g., *pull strings*), whose meanings are still distributed among their parts, and "idiomatic phrases" (e.g., *saw logs*), which are fully non-compositional.

This continuum generally coincides with varying degrees of productivity: compositional NI compounds tend to contain nominal and verbal roots that are productively involved in NI, while non-compositional ones can by definition not easily constitute the analogical basis for the productive formation of new noun-verb stems in the lexicon. Generally, however, NI is relatively highly productive in Kanien'kéha, and is thus often used for new-word formation to name culturally novel concepts (e.g., *kakhwawihstótha* 'fridge', literally 'it makes food cold'), as a useful substitute for borrowing, which is usually resisted in Kanien'kéha. However, it must be stressed that "[t]he productivity of NI is not characteristic of the process as a whole", to the extent that "[e]ach noun stem and verb stem has its own degree of productivity with respect to incorporation" (Mithun, 2011, p. 580). Concretely, this means that, while some verbal roots always incorporate (e.g., *-iio* 'to be good'), others only sometimes do (e.g., *-hninon* 'to buy'), and yet others never do (e.g., *-ianer* 'to be noble').

The same variation in productivity is observed in nouns. Three roots stand out as extremely frequently incorporated, to the point where they barely ever occur as independent nominals:

(3) Verbs with incorporated -'nikonhr- 'mind, spirit' (Mithun, 2004, p. 133)

a.	-'nikonhr-ienta's	mind-obtain	to understand
b.	-'nikonhr-owanen	mind-be.big	to be intelligent
c.	-'nikonhr-hahrha'	mind-hang.up	to worry
d.	-'nikonhr-wenrie's	mind-stir	to amuse so.
e.	-'nikonhr-kwenies	mind-be.able	to convince so.

(4) Verbs with incorporated -ia't- 'body' (Mithun, 2004, p. 133)

a.	-at-ia't-ahton's	SRFL-body-disappear	to get lost
b.	-at-ia't-ionnits	SRFL-body-extend	to stretch out / lie down
c.	-ia't-ata's	body-put.in	to bury so.
d.	-ia't-akens	body-see	to be visible
e.	-ia't-tarihen's	body-be.hot	to be hot (animates)

(5) Verbs with incorporated -rihw- 'matter, idea, business' (Mithun, 2004, p. 133)

a.	te- -rihw-hkhwa'	DUP- -matter-pick.up	to sing (a hymn in a choir)
b.	-rihw-ia'ks	matter-break.in.two	to protest
c.	-rihw-nonhwe's	matter-like	to agree
d.	-rihw-hnirats	matter-strengthen	to confirm / prove
e.	-rihw-onnis	matter-make	to cause

Other nouns are only sometimes incorporated depending on their idiosyncratic productivity level (e.g., -na'tar- 'bread'), and some nouns are never incorporated, typically because they do not exhibit regular Kanien'kéha nominal morphology and therefore do not contain an easily manipulable root (e.g., onomatopoeic animal nouns like kítkit 'chicken'; or foreign loanwords like rakerénshne 'barn' from French 'la grange', followed by the Kanien'kéha locative suffix -hne).

Crucially for our purposes, notice that many of the examples in 3-5 are idiomatic, in the sense that their meaning is not completely compositionally derivable from those of their parts, even though "[their] original semantic basis [...] can be discerned after the fact" (Mithun, 2011, p. 578). In truth, the three

nominal roots in 3-5 are so frequently incorporated that a large part of the Kanien'kéha idiom inventory is historically derived from lexicalized compounds containing them. According to Mithun (2004, p. 134), "[t]his process has left its mark on a significant portion of the vocabulary of the language", resulting in "an explicit classification of many events and states into those with mental, physical, and abstract effects". This relates to the intuition that idioms may often be culturally motivated: perhaps these three nouns are often incorporated in idioms because they reflect some cultural partition of experience into these three categories (although this obviously requires empirical confirmation). This intuition also raises an issue: the apparent idiomaticity of some of these expressions may simply be an artifact of the non-compositionality of their literal English translation, even though they might be fully compositional and hence non-idiomatic when considered within their natural environment, that is the "Kanien'kehá:ka cultural worldview". Fortunately, this has little impact on the research presented here, as most apparently idiomatic expressions that we will consider are actually truly idiomatic (i.e., they are completely opaque, even for fluent speakers with a thorough knowledge of the culture), and as we are interested in L2 learners who are monolingual speakers of English, and hence often "go through" English when interpreting idioms anyway.

4. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS AND L2 REVITALIZATION

This section discusses the results of the focus groups[6]. These were conducted by myself in March 2022, with five fluent adult Kanien'kéha speakers and language workers (who all also have English as an L1). Two one-hour sessions were organized, using the online software Zoom. At the first meeting were present Akwiratékha' Martin, Kanáhstatsi Howard, Owennatékha Maracle, and Rohahí:yo Brant. Tahohtharátye Brant was interviewed individually in a second meeting, due a lack of common availability. Basic information concerning each participant can be found in Table 1 below.

Name	Akwiratékha' Martin (AM)	Kanáhstatsi Howard (KH)	Owennatékha Maracle (OM)	Rohahí:yo Brant (RB)	Tahohtharátye Brant (TB)
Gender	M	F	M	M	M
Community	Kahnawà:ke	Kanehsatà:ke	Ohswé:ken	Tyendinaga	Tyendinaga
Status	L2 (immersion)	L1	L2 (immersion)	L2 (immersion)	L2 (immersion)

Table 1: Participant information

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[6] I have received approval from the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board for this study (Protocol #42097), and the participants have agreed to be identified through the use of their personal names.

The focus groups were conducted as semi-structured group interviews, and were divided into four parts, following my four research questions. I started each part by orally asking, as well as visually displaying through the screen-sharing feature on Zoom, a set of three fairly open-ended questions from my interview guide related to the research question at hand, trying as best as I could not to be too leading. I then let participants lead the discussion, as they strove to answer both my questions and each other's responses. Both focus groups were entirely recorded (audio and video), transcribed manually, and analyzed using the NVivo software. The participant who produced each quote below is identified using their two-initial code, as specified in Table 1.

It should be noted that there were no significant qualitative differences in the types of responses obtained from the L1 speaker as opposed to the L2 speakers, and so the participants will accordingly be treated as one undifferentiated group. Only one L1 speaker (as opposed to four L2 speakers) participated in this study, however, so further research with more L1 speaker perspectives would be beneficial. As a reminder, phrasal idiomaticity was selected only as an easily consciously accessible case study in order to foster discussion during the focus groups, but the main topic of interest was the wider issue of L2 revitalization. As we will see, my interview questions were for the most part successful in leading participants to discuss this larger issue.

The discussion of the results is divided into four parts, like the interviews. Section 4.1 begins with the different functionalities of idioms. This leads us in Section 4.2 to a discussion of "authentic" Kanien'kéha, and of the role of these expressions in it. Section 4.3 then reviews participants' thoughts on the learnability challenges that idiomatic expressions pose for L2 learners. This finally paves the way for a discussion concerning pedagogy, that is potential solutions to these issues, in Section 4.4.

4.1. FUNCTIONALITY

Concerning first the functionality of idioms in speech, we discussed the following questions:

(6) What is the importance and function of idiomatic expressions in speech?

a. How often do you think you use them when speaking?
b. For what purpose do you think you use them?
c. How important do you think they are in speaking, and why?

Regarding question 6a, participants could obviously not provide an actual figure. This could be answered more rigorously by conducting a thorough statistical analysis of a large corpus of spoken

Kanien'kéha, but this is beyond the scope of this work. In any case, the point of this question was to capture participants' impressionistic views, and in that regard they all agreed: L1 speakers use idioms relatively frequently; L2 learners do not use them often enough. Given that this response is more closely related to the issue of authenticity, it will be taken up again in the next section.

As for question 6b, one participant began by emphasizing the diversity of the functions that idiomatic expressions can fulfill, by pointing out that "they all have kinds of different roles" (AM). Participants then suggested four such specific functions. First, three participants mentioned the expressive freedom which idiomatic expressions provide:

(7) Expressive freedom

a. "It shows a picture on how creative the language can be, or how our mind can express itself. So I find it's extremely important for students to learn." (AM)

b. "With our language, I think that, depending on how that person paints the picture, it becomes more and more evident what is important in that story. And, oftentimes, there's more than one meaning, but you understand what the point is […] based on the context that surrounds it. [It] give[s] opportunities for free thinking, and not just concrete 'one word is meaning one thing', you know." (TB)

c. "Sometimes, in these expressions too, there's a slight difference. It means the same thing in English, but in our language it's different. For example, 'to do something on purpose': *wa'ka'nikonhrón:ni'*, it implies that you put some thought into it; but *thá:kehte'*, 'I just did it', you know, 'who cares?'. So there's nuances like that." (KH)

For AM, idiomatic expressions reflect the general creative power of the language, by combining ideas in novel ways to form new concepts. TB more specifically points out that this expressive power resides in the wide range of interpretations that idiomatic expressions can assume depending on the context, providing "opportunities for free thinking". KH gives a specific example of fine semantic nuances which are expressible in Kanien'kéha thanks to these idiomatic expressions, but which are neutralized in English: while *wa'ka'nikonhrón:ni'* (wa'-k-a-'nikonhr-onni-' ; FAC-1SG.AGT-SRFL-mind-make-PUNC) and *thá:kehte'* (th-a-k-eht-e' ; CNTR-FAC-1SG.AGT-go-PUNC) both translate to 'I did it (on purpose)', the former implies that the action was thought through, while the latter that it was not. This is perceived as making idioms expressively valuable tools in the language.

Second, two participants built on this last point, suggesting that the expressive power of idiomatic expressions also enables them to be used for humor:

(8) Humor

a. "Many are for jokes […]. [S]ome are just so wild, so funny. […] Sometimes, they're just out of left field, and they're just so fun." (AM)

b. "My mentor has some amazing stories and jokes and whatnot, so what I noticed is that there's a lot of idiomatic expressions in telling those jokes or stories, whether it's more than one, two, or just multiple different ways of interpreting that word. […] So the purpose of it can be to lighten the mood." (TB)

Thus, idiomatic expressions can be exploited to create humor and hence "lighten the mood". For AM, some of these expressions are inherently funny because of the massive discrepancy between their actual and literal meanings, presumably as perceived through their English translation. For TB, idiomatic expressions are often used for telling jokes, because humor can be created by the ambiguity between their different interpretations, such as their actual and literal meaning. For example, while *wa'khehiatónhsheron'* (wa'-khe-hiaton-hsher-on-' ; FAC-1SG>3SG.INDEF-write-NMZ-give-PUNC) literally means 'I gave someone paper', this expression can also be used idiomatically to mean 'I sued them' (DeCaire p.c.). Many idioms create double-meanings in this way, giving rise to humor. This reinforces the perceived importance of idiomatic expressions in speech, given the crucial role that humor plays in human communication.

Third, two participants discussed another important function carried out by idiomatic expressions, which seems more phatic or social than expressive:

(9) Community connection

a. "When they say it and you know what it means, it kind of creates an immediate bond with people you haven't spoken to before. You know you're gonna have the same background, the same experiences behind you. That's when I enjoy using it." (KH)

b. "That's very true. Because even, as well, different communities will have different ones, right? So when you use them, you're aware that 'okay, we're of the same certain community or family'. And when other people use theirs, you're like 'wow, this is new, this is interesting!'. So it creates like a bond." (AM; immediately replying to 9a)

Here, participants are insisting on the fact that idioms are not only used for their expressive or humoristic potential, but also in order to signal in-group relationships with speakers using the same community or even family dialect, given that these expressions tend to be very dialect-specific (e.g., example 2c *tehotshinétston* 'he is bossy', literally 'he has lengthened his legs', is specific to the Kanehsatà:ke dialect). Using these expressions, or hearing other speakers use these expressions, can establish an "immediate bond" among speakers, insofar as it may index membership in the same community. If one of the primary motivations of language revitalization is the maintenance of the connection to one's identity and community (Sallabank, 2013, p. 79), then linguistic expressions which contribute to this, such as idioms, should unsurprisingly be a key target of such endeavors.

A last function, which was discussed extensively by a single participant, concerns the link between idiomatic expressions and the Kanien'kehá:ka "cultural worldview":

(10) Language and worldview

"I think that when it comes to the purpose, one important aspect of it is the portrayal and perpetuation of a Kanien'kehá:ka mindset. Idiomatic expressions are really talking about the way of knowing or the experiences of our people, and some of these expressions are old. […] It's a really nice way to get a glimpse into the worldview and really understand the knowledge and experience that comes with building vocabulary and expressions in the language." (TB)

The idea here is that idiomatic expressions provide a window onto the Kanien'kehá:ka worldview, in the sense that they reflect the way that previous generations of speakers conceptualized their environment and packaged information into words and phrases, some of which have come to be lexicalized into idiomatic expressions. This seems compatible with the intuition that many idiomatic expressions may be "culturally-motivated" (see Section 3), and reinforces the importance of idiomatic expressions as links between language and culture (Rosborough et al. 2017). Note that the fact that many of these links are empirically unverifiable due to a lack of sufficient evidence, or even provably

objectively untrue, is irrelevant, as we are arguably dealing here with the qualitatively distinct category of subjective speaker impressions, which constitute valuable insights in their own right (Renard, 2021).

As a final sidenote, two participants also underscored the need for a distinction between two kinds of idiomatic expressions:

(11) Two types of idiomatic expressions

a. "Many are for jokes, but also there's many that are just daily expressions. […] So sometimes you're just embedded in the language naturally to express our feelings and thoughts, whereas some are just so wild, so funny. […] Because at times, there are these everyday expressions, but then there's other ones where there's a difference. There's an actual verb for it, and then there's an expression for it as well." (AM)

b. "[T]here are these things embedded in the language. It's only if you think a little more deeply about the meaning that you go 'oh, that's a metaphor, that's a description that doesn't really compare with the English usage!'. […] We could spend all day talking about everything, almost every object, it's all a description. So we use shortcuts in English to say 'hat' and 'table', and really it's got a fundamental meaning, and so is that an idiomatic expression? Yes, it is." (OM)

The idea here is that we must distinguish between two kinds of idioms: "wild" idiomatic expressions, which are recent enough for their internal components to be identified, so that they can easily be recognized as non-compositional by speakers (e.g., all the examples we have seen so far); and "everyday" idiomatic expressions, which are not necessarily perceived as equally non-compositional even though they really are, because they are much older terms that are "embedded in the language", that is simply accepted as whole lexicalized forms (e.g., *atekhwà:ra* 'table', literally at-khw-ahr-a ; SRFL-food-set.up-HAB ; 'it is used to put food on'). If we included this latter category, most words in the language would count as idiomatic expressions, given the historical productivity of processes such as NI and affixal derivation for new-word formation. This work accordingly focuses exclusively on the more recent and hence more conspicuously idiomatic type of idioms.

As was implied throughout, these ideas also form indirect responses to question 6c: because of their expressive, humoristic, phatic, and cultural functions, idioms are viewed as "extremely important" elements of Kanien'kéha speech that "have to be saved and conserved as best as we could" (AM). That is, they are key components of "authentic" Kanien'kéha, to which we now turn.

4.2. AUTHENTICITY

Regarding the issue of authenticity, I asked participants the following questions:

(12) What role do idiomatic expressions play in the construction of "authentic" Kanien'kéha?

a. What do you think constitutes "authentic" Kanien'kéha?

b. Is it necessarily the end goal of L2 revitalization?

c. How important do you think idioms are for this "authentic" Kanien'kéha, and why?

Answers to the first two questions were straightforward: "Authentic" Kanien'kéha is the speech of fluent L1 elders, and it should indeed be the end goal of revitalization efforts (see Section 2 for more details).

The truly pivotal question which generated much discussion can be found in 12c. We have seen in the previous section that idiomatic expressions are key components of Kanien'kéha speech, due to their central expressive, humoristic, phatic, and cultural functions. Participants more specifically agreed that idioms are crucial elements of authentic Kanien'kéha. This was implied by two caveats which they brought up. First, three participants mentioned that new L2 speakers often lack sufficient use or comprehension of these expressions, making their speech less authentic:

(13) Lack of idiomatic expressions in L2 speech

a. "It makes me think of, as well, when I hear new speakers, it's that these expressions sometimes are missing. And so, at times, when they're like trying to express a thought or an event to you, you notice that they're like circumlocating around their topic, and I'm like 'you're missing that expression in order to get it'. […] And it's funny at times when these expressions just come out, and L2 learners might not understand. Even if you're extremely proficient, grammar-wise amazing, a lot of vocabulary, at times you can see that these community-based expressions are missing." (AM)

b. "I would add here that I use them [idiomatic expressions] almost never, because I didn't grow up hearing it, and I didn't learn it from first language speakers. I learnt just by bits and pieces. I know how to put words together, so I can put together simple language, and the number of these metaphors I know, I can count on one hand, really." (OM)

c. "I don't think I use these idiomatic expressions as much as I need to. I think that's a challenge with being a second language learner." (TB)

AM in 22a makes the unsurprising observation that less proficient L2 speakers use and understand fewer idioms than more proficient L2 and L1 speakers, and seems to imply that their speech is less authentic as a result. Even OM and TB, who are highly proficient L2 learners, admit that they do not use idiomatic expressions as often as they would like. The key point, then, is that most participants seem to believe that authentic Kanien'kéha entails the use of at least some idiomatic expressions.

This brings us to the second caveat: to speak authentically, one must not only use any idiomatic expressions; these idioms must also be authentic themselves. Three participants thus rejected as inauthentic new English-based idiomatic expressions created by younger speakers:

(14) Youth slang and authentic idiomatic expressions

a. "The students nowadays, not my generation but the younger students in their early twenties, they're trying to make their own expressions. And I hate it! I do not like it because they originate from English, right? […] One that they're always saying is *wa'tkaterihwawèn:rate'* [wa'-te-k-at-rihw-a-wenrat-e' ; FAC-DUP-1SG.AGT-matter-JOIN-go.over-PUNC], meaning 'I'm over it'. And I'm like 'stop saying that, say something that we have!'." (AM)

b. "[T]hese things that they're coming up with, it's rooted in English. It's not rooted in our traditional relation to the environment, or our relation to our traditions, you know. It's all rooted in English and popular culture. So that's really annoying me." (OM)

c. "I think they [idioms] are important, provided they're […] not the ones Akwiratékha' referred to, that are just created, because they're translated from another language. As long as it doesn't follow the pattern of another language, I think it's important." (KH)

AM and OM in 14a,b are referring to a phenomenon whereby young L2 learners may create new Kanien'kéha idioms by directly semantically calquing from English idioms, rather than based on native patterns (e.g., *I'm over it > wa'tkaterihwawèn:rate'* 'I went over the matter'). Participants clearly reject

such expressions as inauthentic, to the extent that they are "rooted in English", and recommend using "what we have", that is authentic native expressions, instead. KH in 14c articulates a summary of this position: idiomatic expressions are important in speech, as long as they are authentic expressions reflecting native ways of thinking, and not foreign calques reflecting "the pattern of another language". In other words, in order to "sound authentic", one has to frequently use idiomatic expressions which are authentic themselves; that is, which are rooted in native rather than foreign thought patterns. This is arguably a manifestation of a broader tendency among Northern Iroquoian languages to favour native over foreign resources in new-word formation (e.g., they overwhelmingly prefer native verbal descriptions over foreign nominal borrowings for new Western concepts; see Section 3). A similar attitude is found in many other endangered Indigenous language communities. Hinton and Ahlers (1999, p. 56), for instance, mention that, in some communities in California, "new words can be developed in a way authentic to a given language which reflects traditional values and thoughts".

Beyond not using enough idiomatic expressions, or using non-native ones, L2 speech may also be less authentic if it is unnecessarily complex, as was mentioned by three participants:

(15) Simpler language may be more authentic

a. "When L2 speakers create words that a speaker has difficulty deciphering because they're trying to incorporate too much, it's like 'what is it that they're trying to say?'. […] I think, going back to authentic Kanien'kéha, I think the less complex noun incorporations are more authentic language, it's what I found anyway. [In Kanien'kéha: sometimes L2 speakers incorporate a lot in an effort to sound more authentic, but it ends up being less authentic because they do it too much]." (KH)

b. "They [L2 learners] have good teachers, but sometimes they try to push the boundary. You have to just be like 'no, I'm sorry'. Otherwise, you can't distinguish truly what they mean, what's the focus within their verb at times. […] [P]eople always want a Kanien'kéha name, but they always want it to be so fancy and flowery, but it doesn't work. They try to incorporate too many verbs, too many nouns, and it just falls apart." (AM)

c. "I remember when I was learning, I was talking to my uncle who was a speaker, and he told me that he'd sold some land. So I asked him '*ónhka wahsheiatenhontsahní:nonhse'?* [onhka wa-hshei-aten-honts-a-hninon-hse-' ; who FAC-2SG>3SG.INDEF-SRFL-land-JOIN-buy-APPL-PUNC], who did you sell the land to?'. And he sits there and says 'what are you trying to say? why didn't you just say *ónhka wa'ehní:non'?* [onhka wa'-e-hninon-' ; who FAC-3SG.INDEF-buy-PUNC], who bought it?'. As in, 'why don't you cut to the chase?'." (OM)

The idea is that, contrary to common impressions, more authentic language is not necessarily more complex language; in fact, it can often be the other way around. In particular, NI, as a novel linguistic mechanism which is not found in L2 learners' L1 and is thus especially challenging to acquire, is often perceived as the hallmark of the polysynthetic essence of Kanien'kéha, and hence as a prime indicator of authenticity (this may also partly explain why idioms involving NI are considered so fundamental to authenticity). Essentially, for many L2 learners, the more one incorporates, the more authentic one's speech is. As KH points out, this problematically leads many of them to over-incorporate in an effort to sound more authentic, including at points where L1s would use a non-incorporated form, which may ultimately lower their authenticity. This point is echoed by AM: sometimes L2 learners incorporate too much, which may obscure which constituent receives focus within the clause, given that focus is generally expressed by "excorporating" and fronting the targeted constituent (DeCaire et al., 2017). Similarly, L2 speakers may sometimes form new NI structures which are not lexically sanctioned (Mithun, 1984, p. 872), in order to create a name which sounds as authentic as possible. Finally, OM relates a specific example of an encounter with an L1 speaker who urged him to use simpler language, implying again that more complexity does not necessarily equate to higher authenticity.

The remarks in 15 are crucial, because they indicate that authenticity does not only depend on phrasal idiomaticity (i.e., idiomatic expressions), but also on expressive idiomaticity (i.e., native-like discourse patterns). This speaks to the larger challenge to which idiomatic expressions belong: L2 learners often face tremendous obstacles in suppressing L1 interference and acquiring a final layer of proficiency, which comprises things like idiomatic expressions and L1-like prosodic and discourse patterns, in order to speak and hence transmit a truly authentic version of the language. According to TB, this can go as far as impeding the comprehensibility of L2 speech to native speakers:

(16) Incomprehensibility

"I took a full year in an adult immersion course […], and then we ran a Kanien'kéha-speaking home, and I was still largely incomprehensible to first language speakers. And it wasn't until ten years later that I was able to develop that. So again that speaks to this authentic language. Was the language that I was speaking authentic? No, it was translated English thoughts, using different words, and terrible pronunciation. […] When they [L2 learners] come out of immersion programs, if they're anything like me, they're gonna be incomprehensible to first language speakers. […] And what specific obstacles must they face? Yeah, as I said, one of them is unlearning, or relearning." (TB)

Thus, L2 speech is often difficult to understand for L1 speakers (or at least for unsympathetic L1 speakers), because it lacks the key components of authentic Kanien'kéha which we listed above, and excessively relies on the structure of English, to the point where it might sound like "translated English thoughts". As we will see in Section 5, TB argues that this is partly due to the limitations of immersion programs which over-rely on the "grammar-translation" approach (i.e., a grammar-based approach to L2 revitalization), and therefore focus on grammatical correctness rather than L1-like speech. However, he suggests that it can be remedied by "unlearning" incorrect forms and "relearning" authentic ones through exposure to L1 speech.

One consequence of this which TB also mentioned is that it gives rise to a new "L2 variety" of the language, as students coming out of these programs can easily communicate with each other, but are difficult to comprehend for L1 speakers:

(17) New L2 variety

"It's interesting, these speakers that are coming out of these programs, they can converse with each other, because they're at the same understanding and they talk to each other, but they come out and it's obvious the difference between how they speak and how others speak. […] There's an obvious breach of comprehensibility." (TB)

Because L2 learners typically attend comparable immersion programs, involving similar language training and constant interaction with other L2 speakers, they have no difficulty understanding one

another. As we have seen, however, it can sometimes be difficult for L1 speakers to understand them. Effectively, the result is the emergence of a new and slightly different L2 variety of the language.

If community-members are willing to accept some amount of language change, this would not necessarily be an issue. In fact, Holton (2009) suggests revitalizing a purposely creolized L2 variety of a language instead of the native-like speech patterns, as it greatly facilitates L2 acquisition. This L2 variety may then either serve as an end in itself, or as a stepping-stone for the acquisition of the L1 variety. Zuckermann (2020) goes even further, claiming that Modern Hebrew is a hybrid language with both Hebrew and various Indo-European parents, as the first generation of language planners acquired the language imperfectly as an L2 and subconsciously imported influences from their L1s, which became fixed in the language as their children acquired their parents' L2 as an L1. He insists, however, that this nativized L2 variety should not be discarded as "broken Hebrew", but rather celebrated as a new language with its own complexity. A parallel can be drawn with Kanien'kéha: perhaps speakers could accept L2 learners' "inauthentic" language, with unavoidable English influences, as a necessary step in the revitalization of Kanien'kéha, before the next generation nativizes this L2 as an L1. Of course, they would then have to accept this generation's new L1 as equally authentic compared to the original variety, even if its structure is substantially derived from English. Some might see this as a necessary compromise for the language to survive at all; but the key difference with Hebrew is that there are actual L1s remaining, so that the speech community might understandably wish to aim for this L1 variety instead in order to maximize authenticity.

If this is the case, that is if L1 speech is held up as the non-negotiable end goal of revitalization, as seems to be happening in Kanien'kehá:ka communities, then additional measures must be taken to ensure that L2 learners acquire this final layer of authentic proficiency and minimize English influence. Ultimately, this is a question of how high a given speech community wants to "set the bar" for L2 revitalization (Holton, 2009, p. 263–264): if the bar is set high and nothing less than full mastery of the authentic L1 variety is accepted, then we retain full authenticity, but risk creating an obstacle too difficult for L2 learners to overcome; if the bar is set lower and L2 learners are allowed to use a less complex form of the language (possibly with some influence from English), then we greatly simplify the task for L2 learners and increase our chances of success, at the cost of sacrificing a certain degree of authenticity. This trade-off constitutes a continuum of equally valid strategies rather than a binary choice, and there is no objectively superior solution. Each speech community needs to select an optimal strategy in light of its linguistic, historical, social, and political context. Kanien'kehá:ka communities seem to lean towards the high end of this spectrum, with a higher degree of authenticity required of L2 learners, which may partly explain the greater difficulties which they encounter. Crucially, however, this does not detract from the validity of their objective: these difficulties should be seen as a challenge to overcome, rather than as a problem casting doubt on the whole enterprise.

This idea is captured by a final remark from KH:

(18) "Subjective" authenticity

"I think we can think of 'authentic' as authentic at the time for each learner. The key is to use the language they're comfortable with at that point in their language-learning journey. And as they go along, they'll get more and more authentic." (KH)

Here, KH is making the interesting point that authenticity should perhaps be viewed as a subjective rather than an objective concept; that is, as defined relative to each speaker's proficiency, instead of as equating native-like speech in an absolute sense. This is not meant as a formal or technical definition of authenticity, which should probably continue to be understood as L1 speech. Rather, it seems meant to encourage sympathetic attitudes from native speakers towards the difficulties which L2 learners encounter in their "language-learning journey". We now turn to these difficulties.

4.3. LEARNABILITY

To examine the learnability obstacles posed by idioms, I asked participants these three questions:

(19) What challenges do idiomatic expressions present to L2 learners?

a. How are L2 learners usually taught these expressions?
b. How difficult are they for L2 learners to acquire?
c. What are the specific obstacles that L2 learners must face?

Responses to 19a mostly centred around their status within immersion curricula following the grammar-translation approach. Specifically, three participants discussed the fact that idiomatic expressions are usually not explicitly taught in immersion programs:

(20) Idiomatic expressions and immersion programs

a. "I found with teaching too, none of them [idiomatic expressions] are in our curriculum, right? […] But it's the absolute first thing they [students] want to learn, I found. […] But, yes, we don't teach them here [at Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa]. Well, it's about creating a foundation to become an effective communicator of the language. You know, for the sake of time, we have to focus on verbs, the polysynthetic nature." (RB)

b. "I think I can just speak to how I acquired these expressions. And that came more as a mentor-apprentice type of learning environment. […] It wasn't really explicitly taught through my language-learning programs. […] Most of my learning of these terms comes from just communication with first language speakers." (TB)

c. "The focus for the end goal of L2 revitalization, at least in this community, the way I see it, it should be the re-establishment of parent-to-child language transmission. […] And anything that gets us there is adding to that point. And something that doesn't contribute is not getting us there, what we should be working towards." (OM)

Note that all of these participants have both attended and taught in immersion programs using the grammar-translation approach.

RB and TB begin by pointing out that idiomatic expressions are absent from immersion curricula, despite the fact that students are often very interested in acquiring them in the early stages of language acquisition, perhaps in an attempt to access authentic language as quickly as possible. RB justifies this absence in terms of the incompatibility of the priorities of these programs with the teaching of idioms: because their goal is to provide students with a "foundational" understanding of Kanien'kéha grammar in order to make them "effective communicators of the language" within a limited time, they understandably focus on teaching the "polysynthetic nature" of the language (given the massive typological distance between it and learners' analytic L1), and therefore have no time to devote to idioms. OM, who teaches at the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa language school in Ohswé:ken with RB, concurs by implying that teaching idiomatic expressions are probably not the priority for their community: if one takes a step back and considers the ultimate goal of revitalization, namely the re-establishment of inter-generational transmission, then it makes sense to focus on core aspects of the language such as verbal morphology, and leave peripheral elements such as idioms aside. (This is

related to the tension mentioned in Section 4.2 between the two opposite goals of maximizing the authenticity of L2 speech (e.g., by teaching idioms) vs facilitating L2 acquisition (e.g., by focusing on core language), which parallels the tension between the two approaches to L2 revitalization discussed in Section 5). TB remarks that a consequence of this decision is that, if L2 learners acquire idiomatic expressions at all, it is usually later through natural interaction with L1 speakers (see Section 4.4). AM echoes TB's remark: "Usually, what I notice is that they [L2 learners] learn them [idiomatic expressions] through situational conversations." The picture seems clear: idioms tend to be "picked up" in context by using the language with L1s, rather than explicitly taught in immersion programs.

Question 19b was less directly addressed by participants, perhaps understandably given the difficulty of quantifying such matters. The various obstacles mentioned in response to question 19c, however, suggest that idiomatic expressions represent a significant challenge for L2 learners. First, AM mentioned the opacity of the relation between the actual and literal meanings of some idioms:

(21) Opaque idioms

"I remember one of my favourite ones [idiomatic expressions] from Kanehsatà:ke: *wakatà:riote* [wak-at-ari-ot-e ; 1SG.PAT-SRFL-hook-stand.up-STAT]. And I was like 'what?'. I didn't get it. This is not our [Kahnawà:ke] expression. Sometimes they're just out of left field […]. It means 'I'm flirting', literally 'my hook is standing up', like you're ready to catch somebody." (AM)

The idea is that some idiomatic expressions are inherently challenging to memorize, at least if one breaks them down into their component morphemes and does not learn them as wholes, because the link between their actual and literal meanings is difficult to understand, and the actual meaning cannot be predicted from the literal one; that is, the expression is wholly non-compositional (Mithun, 2011, p. 577–578; see also Section 3). If learners systematically acquire vocabulary following the grammar-translation approach, that is by combining individual morphemes and compositionally computing the meaning of the created form, then such idioms might be difficult to learn, because they require overriding the semantic contribution of known morphemes with a holistic non-compositional meaning. This was mentioned by TB: "If we're using grammar-translation approaches, there's very likely going to be little space for idiomatic-type expressions, because if we're looking for literal translations, then this isn't gonna work." This also means that memorizing idiomatic expressions as lexicalized wholes, which is likelier to happen if they are acquired more holistically through interaction with L1s, could in principle solve this problem. Unfortunately, as suggested in Section 4.1, only "everyday" idiomatic expressions are learnt this way, not "wild" ones.

AM then followed up on his previous point by proposing a cause for the opacity of this actual meaning - literal meaning connection:

(22) Obscure historical origin

"We [L2 speakers] haven't seen the world the same as the elders have. […] I noticed, most of the time, that these expressions are rooted in a different era, where things operated differently. Their jobs were different, probably technology was different, the environment was different. So sometimes these expressions reflect then, and at times for myself I understand the expression and why it's used, but I've never seen it. […] And so these expressions, they don't match with modern times, because we don't see it, but the expression has carried on." (AM)

AM observes that, as mentioned in Section 3, idiomatic expressions probably start out as compositional expressions coined for a specific purpose within a particular historical context, and then survive as descriptions of a more abstract situation even after the original context has become irrelevant. This not only breaks the predictability linking the literal meaning to the now non-compositional actual meaning; it also makes the post-hoc recovery of the actual meaning much more difficult, as speakers lack the real-world knowledge and experiences to grasp the historical basis of this mapping (contrary to, for instance, *wakatà:riote* above, where the actual meaning cannot at first be predicted from the literal one, but the link between the two can be understood after they have been revealed). This arguably further complexifies the memorization and acquisition of these idiomatic expressions, because learners cannot anchor their understanding of these expressions in extra-linguistic knowledge. The idiomatic expression in 1 (*tewakatene'konhrekstha'tsheriià:kon* 'I am broke', literally 'my hammer is broken into two pieces') provides a good example of this, as we have seen: it probably originated in a time during which professions involving hammers remained the primary sources of income for many speakers, which is no longer the case today.

This seems to be part of a larger challenge, whereby idioms become more difficult to acquire if they are based on a reality, or on an understanding of reality, which learners cannot access. Another example can be found in an idea mentioned in Section 4.1: if Kanien'kéha idiomatic expressions provide a "window onto the Kanien'kehá:ka worldview", then we might imagine that they are more difficult to acquire precisely because they are grounded in a cultural system which some learners who live in the dominant Western society are not thoroughly familiar with. Trying to memorize idioms through the understanding of the link between their actual and literal meaning would therefore involve learning a new cultural worldview as well, adding to an already daunting task. Inversely, being familiar

with the Kanien'kehá:ka "cultural worldview" might help one make sense of and memorize idiomatic expressions during L2 acquisition. No participant explicitly mentioned this point, but it does not necessarily mean that it plays no role in this issue; rather, further research is needed.

Another key obstacle mentioned by TB relates to the usage of idiomatic expressions:

(23) Usage

"I think the difficulty is finding out where and when and how to use them [idioms]." (TB)

While we have so far mostly focused on the acquisition difficulties that idiomatic expressions present in terms of memorization, TB points out that mastering their appropriate usage in speech can be equally, if not more, challenging. Indeed, for each of them, one has to acquire the dialect in which it is actually used, the registers in which it is acceptably used (some, especially the humorous ones, often revolve around socially taboo topics such as sex), as well as the social situations in which it is felicitously used (i.e., the contexts to which it applies); and this is without even considering its integration with other elements within the information structure of a given utterance.

In this sense, the difficulties which idiomatic expressions present are similar to the challenges raised by the acquisition of the Kanien'kéha discourse particles, as mentioned by three participants:

(24) Particles

a. "The mastery of particle phrases is one of the indicators of high levels of proficiency. These particles, how they're used […] actually can change entirely the context of a word. So you get this noun, incorporated verb, or phrase, and depending on how you use the particles that surround it, that can change entirely what the context of the phrase is." (TB)

b. "Yes, and going back to authentic language, there is a lot of particles heard in the speaker. It's full of particles, particles all the time. They're missing if you're thinking in another language. Through English, it won't come." (KH)

c. "I'm thinking these idiomatic expressions kind of go in the same way as particles, and how difficult particles are to attain or to teach. Students really want to know, well, 'what are all the particles? I know all the prefixes; I can learn all the particles'. I'm like 'hm, hang on…'. The differences between all these particles, you know, if we're trying to go through each of them and find a translation, no, that's contextual learning." (RB)

TB presents the complex discourse mechanisms in which particles are involved, thus explaining why they constitute a reliable indicator of higher proficiency, and hence higher authenticity. KH concurs, emphasizing the omnipresence of particles in L1 speech, and pointing out that they are often missing from L2 speech, especially if speakers are "thinking in another language". RB accounts for this by mentioning the difficulties that particles present to both teachers and learners, and concludes that this is an area of the language best acquired contextually, as we have seen for idiomatic expressions. Again, this suggests that participants used our case study on idioms as an opportunity to discuss the wider issue of the missing layer of authentic proficiency in L2 speech, to which particles also belong.

A final obstacle mentioned by AM concerns the lack of opportunities to use idioms:

(25) Lack of opportunities to use idiomatic expressions

"I think part of a bigger challenge would be having a bigger speech community that's really proficient, but we're not there yet. […] I'm aware and I know a lot of them [idiomatic expressions], but I don't really use them all, because they don't fit with what my daily activities are. I'll use the ones that work for my life, but usually some don't occur." (AM)

If a major part of L2 acquisition involves strengthening neural pathways through practice, then it is reasonable to hypothesize that lacking opportunities to use certain aspects of the target language makes these aspects more difficult to acquire. For AM, this is essentially what we find for idiomatic expressions, in two major ways. First, the absence of a larger and more proficient speech community means that there are fewer people for learners to practice using idiomatic expressions with (this is of course a more general issue which applies to all aspects of the Kanien'kéha language). Second, the specificity of some of these expressions means that contexts in which they are relevant rarely occur in most people's lives in our modern world (e.g., hopefully, situations in which speakers could utter *tewakatene'konhrekstha'tsheriià:kon* 'I am broke' are rare). The acquisition of idioms is thus further

complexified by the lack of opportunities to practice using them. Even if they still learn them through brute-force rote memorization, it is unlikely that they will retain them without practice.

Idioms are therefore clearly difficult for L2 learners to acquire, because of the multiple obstacles we have reviewed. This leads us to our last question: what can be done to overcome these obstacles?

4.4. PEDAGOGY

For our last topic concerning pedagogy, the following questions were raised:

(26) How can we improve the L2 acquisition of idiomatic expressions?

a. What is your objective for improving the situation?
b. What can be done concretely to realize that objective?
c. How can we facilitate the teaching of idiomatic expressions to L2 learners?

Again, participants did not tackle question 26a (and by extension 26b) directly, but it is strongly implied by their various responses to 26c that their objective is for L2 learners to learn and use more idiomatic expressions. In light of this goal, they discussed several strategies that could be implemented to facilitate the teaching and L2 acquisition of idioms.

Two participants first mentioned the possibility of explicitly teaching these expressions:

(27) Explicit teaching

a. "I guess maybe when you're designing the program, you could establish the most common ones that are used and actually teach them, or make sure you're using them in class." (KH)

b. "Sometimes it has to be overtly taught. Like they don't get something and so you have to make it into a lesson, right? [...] They [idiomatic expressions] need to be associated with other verbs that are kind of similar, going hand in hand. Like, for example, when we teach a certain verb, you can say 'well, there's also this expression you can use'." (AM)

For KH, it might be beneficial to overtly teach idioms, especially the most common ones, as part of the core immersion curriculum, alongside more traditional grammatical components. This could

potentially help students memorize them, like any other lexical item that they have to learn during the immersion program. AM concurs, and suggests two concrete options: either establish an entire unit devoted exclusively to idiomatic expressions, or teach them "as they come up" (e.g., every time students learn a new verb, the instructor can mention in passing a few of the most common idioms based on it).

Explicitly teaching idiomatic expressions raises some issues, however. For instance, two participants discussed the potential dangers of over-focusing on etymology:

(28) The dangers of etymology

a. "[A]s instructors, you know, we have this curriculum that we follow at Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa, we got six hours a day to teach it. So we have to keep our pacing in line. And oftentimes, […] other students will say 'I need to know what every little part of every single word translates to, and I need to know right now'. You can spend all day dissecting a couple of words, but what have we really learned at the end of the day?" (RB)

b. "Yeah, it can turn into a distraction, probably. It is great, but we can't see the benefits to focusing too much on it at times, right?" (AM; immediately replying to 28a)

The point is that time constraints in these immersion programs, as well as their emphasis on core grammatical notions, mean that explicitly teaching idiomatic expressions risks leading the class down etymological rabbit holes, taking up a significant portion of time that could have been employed to more productive purposes, as curious students try to analyze the morphemic composition of an expression. Again taking the same example, the idiom in 1 *tewakatene'konhrekstha'tsheriià:kon* 'I am broke' is composed of no fewer than six distinct morphemes (te-wak-ate-ne'konhrekstha'tsher-iia'k-on ; DUP-1SG.PAT-SRFL-hammer-break-STAT), including one lexicalized deverbal incorporated nominal stem which could be further decomposed into five morphemes (-ne-konhrek-st-ha-'tsher- ; SRFL-strike-CAUS-HAB-NMZ ; 'hammer'), so that studying its etymology could take very long. This is not to say that the etymology of these expressions does not matter, of course; but immersion programs with limited time and resources must make sacrifices in order to achieve their objectives.

In order to mitigate these issues, three participants suggested project-based methods instead:

(29) Project-based learning

a. "In Kahnawà:ke, it is foundational, but they do put in these expressions, because they learn mostly through project-based learning." (AM)

b. "It's a lot of project-based stuff. […] These projects, that's where these expressions come up definitely organically, especially in talking with L1 speakers. […] We have like a class lexicon too, and that's just a Google document for these expressions and cool things. So they talk to L1 speakers, re-listen to it through an active listening exercise where they transcribe and try to translate everything." (RB)

c. "I think a good method perhaps would be to just give them the expression, then ask them to go search a speaker to explain the meaning of it, and then they come back and explain to the class what the expression means. And then as a recap of them all, a fun thing to do is to have them mime the expression. […] They would remember it more I think that way, without always going through English." (KH)

AM mentions that the immersion program in Kahnawà:ke includes project-based learning into its curriculum, providing opportunities for learners to acquire some idiomatic expressions. RB presents in more detail the projects that students carry out in the third-year program at Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa: students record conversations with L1 speakers, and then listen back to them in order to transcribe and translate them. Idioms often tend to spontaneously come up during these conversations, which students can then add to the shared class lexicon. KH proposes an alternative project-based option: give students an idiom, have them look for its meaning by asking L1 speakers, and then let them present their findings to the class orally or through miming. Presumably, such project-based methods in which students more actively engage with the materials allow them to "remember it more".

Two participants went further, by promoting the "contextual" acquisition of idioms:

(30) Contextual learning

a. "I think it's important to learn it [idiomatic expressions] naturally too, and not just like get a lesson per se. When it comes up, then teach it." (KH)

b. "I think it's about contextual language development, that's based in the learner's everyday lived experiences. I think that's where it [idiomatic expressions] will come up the most easily. We need to anchor our approach, our curriculum, our pedagogy. What phrases, what words, what actions, what tasks do we need to complete every day?" (TB)

For KH, it is important to acquire idiomatic expressions "naturally" (i.e., through interaction with native speakers), as explicit lessons might not always be very effective to that end, presumably due to the difficulty of accurately transmitting knowledge concerning the contexts in which idiomatic expressions can or cannot be used within an immersion curriculum which understandably focuses on grammar. TB expands on this idea: immersion programs have to "anchor" their teaching of idioms in "everyday lived experiences" in order to enable "contextual language development." In other words, given that idioms are best acquired contextually, as we saw in Section 4.3, we need to explicitly promote this technique.

Note that these last two methods of project-based and contextual learning systematically involve interaction with L1 speakers, something which three participants promoted on a larger scale:

(31) The importance of interacting with L1 speakers

a. "You can just go and live with an elder after immersion, to learn the language." (AM)

b. "I think more incorporation of first language knowledge in adult second language programming, in whichever way, is needed. […] I would really like to see little first language speaker teams of two or three first language speakers come to Tyendinaga and work with families, in their homes, doing regular everyday things in the language, and helping them develop proficiency." (TB)

c. "Language-learning is a lot of interacting with sympathetic and non-sympathetic interlocutors, and you're gonna learn a lot from both of those. You can make all kinds of mistakes to some speakers, and they'll just let you go […]. Other times, you'll get people who stop you every time you make a mistake. But both types of interlocutors are very beneficial to your language-learning." (RB)

The idea is that one effective way to acquire the missing layer of authentic proficiency (including idioms) and suppress interference from English is to communicate as much as possible with native speakers post-immersion. This interaction can take several forms: while AM discusses the option of L2 learners moving into L1 speakers' homes, TB mentions that it is also possible for L1 speakers to move into L2-learning homes in order to create a totally Kanien'kéha-speaking household. RB remarks on the importance of the different attitudes of L1 speakers towards imperfect L2 speech: both sympathetic and unsympathetic speakers are "very beneficial to your language-learning", presumably because the former inspire motivation and encouragements, while the latter provide actual negative feedback which helps the learners correct their mistakes. The larger point is that using the language with L1 speakers can only help learners enhance their fluency post-immersion, by providing a more "holistic" environment filled with authentic language. This idea is also found in Green and O. Maracle (2018, p. 149): "Former learners of Kanyen'kéha in programs organized using RWM [the Root-Word Method, a grammar-translation approach] who have become highly proficient second-language speakers have sought out contact with native speakers of Kanyen'kéha after program completion and in this way have acquired native speaker-like semantics, prosody, and pragmatics".

Accessing L1 speech is not always easily feasible, however. Given the advanced age of most L1 speakers, the only way for L2 learners to increase their interactions with them is generally to move to the community where they reside, which is not something that everyone can do on a whim:

(32) Practical concerns

a. "A lot of the students are married and have families. They're not gonna pick up and move for months to another community. Many of them just don't have the opportunity." (OM)

b. "Some [students] don't have to worry about finding a job, or they don't have a family to take care of or anything; they can just get up and move. We find that they become the most proficient." (RB; immediately replying to 32a)

OM points out that many immersion graduates have strong ties to their local community (e.g., family, employment, etc.), which prevents them from moving to another area with L1 speakers. RB makes the same observation, only in reverse: it is precisely these learners who do have the opportunity to move who end up becoming the most proficient L2 speakers. The practical impossibility for many L2 learners of enhancing interactions with L1 speakers post-immersion sadly means that they may not

easily acquire this final layer of authentic proficiency which contains idioms. In some cases, a more general decline in their post-immersion language use frequency might even lead to a proficiency drop.

TB points out that this issue is exacerbated in communities without access to L1 speakers:

(33) Absence of L1 speakers

"You know, obviously in Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke, and Akwesáhsne, it's easier because they have access to first language speakers, whereas in Tyendinaga, Ohswé:ken, and Wáhta, we might need to be more creative about how we incorporate first language speaker knowledge in our language learning programs, and one way is through documentation." (TB)

As TB remarks, Eastern (geographically, not dialectally) communities (Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke, and Akwesáhsne) still have significant L1 populations, providing local L2 learners and immersion programs with easy access to native speaker knowledge, which facilitates the acquisition of L1-like authentic language. Western communities (Tyendinaga, Ohswé:ken, and Wáhta), however, have virtually no L1 speakers left, bringing them to a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, if they wish to revitalize the local dialect which is no longer spoken natively, they have to sacrifice a certain degree of authenticity (e.g., losing some idiomatic expressions) by not integrating L1 knowledge in their curricula. On the other hand, if they accept some influence from other dialects, they may invite native speakers from other communities to provide guidance. However, as we have seen, most remaining L1 speakers are elderly, and it may not always be feasible for them to travel to other communities for extended periods of time. More importantly, given the current low rate of inter-generational transmission, this also means that, when these remaining speakers sadly pass away within the next generation, native speaker knowledge will be lost. One solution would be to re-establish inter-generational transmission before this happens, in order to make the situation sustainable; but there is no guarantee of the extent to which this can be accomplished within the current time frame.

Language documentation of L1 speech, as mentioned in 33, may also be a viable strategy:

(34) Language documentation

"One of the ways that we have to acquire [the language] is through documented materials. Because of the aging demographic of our speakers, it's always more and more important that we bring them to us, and the cool thing is that we have these technological tools to help bring them to us. […] It's not ideal. Ideally, we would have inter-generational within the home, whether that's a formal or informal setting." (TB)

TB has years of experience in Kanien'kéha language documentation, mostly through his participation in the Ratiwennókwas documentation project[7]. For him, documenting native speaker knowledge, especially unpredictable elements such as idioms, is an effective way of preserving the knowledge of L1 speakers in the face of their "aging demographic", and of integrating it into L2 immersion curricula, thereby filling in the gap left by the lack of L1 speakers in certain communities without physically displacing them. Documenting L1 speech in depth would not only be useful for Western communities which have no native speakers left, but will eventually be a key component of revitalization efforts in Eastern communities as well, as the remaining L1 speakers on whom they rely now will most likely pass away within the next generation. Furthermore, TB adds that language documentation can now be greatly aided by new technologies, such as digital recording and transcription software. A final point is that the process of documentation itself, and not just its results, can also contribute to L2 proficiency development (Brant p.c.): L2 students can learn just as much by directly engaging in the process of recording and transcribing L1 speech, as they do by using the materials resulting from this process.

TB nevertheless concludes by pointing out that L2 teaching, no matter how well-informed by L1 knowledge, can never trump the efficiency of natural inter-generational transmission within the home, making it easy to see why the re-establishment of this process is the ultimate end goal of all Kanien'kéha L2 revitalization efforts. Of course, which pedagogical method is best to use in order to achieve this objective remains an open question, and much more research needs to be done to compare the advantages and disadvantages of different techniques (e.g., explicit teaching, project-based learning, contextual learning, immersion with L1 elders, documentation, etc.). Throughout the

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[7] Ratiwennókwas is a Kanien'kéha language documentation project organized by the Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na Language and Cultural Centre (TTO), whose goal is to record and transcribe the speech of L1 elders in order to inform L2 curriculums. The project started in 2013, with the first sessions focusing on idiomatic expressions, and six iterations have been conducted so far. The resulting corpus can be accessed freely on the TTO website.

paper, however, our discussion of idioms within the larger topic of L2 revitalization has revealed a debate between two main approaches to this issue, which we take up in the next and final section.

5. TWO APPROACHES TO L2 REVITALIZATION

Our discussion so far has frequently led us to consider the implications of the so-called "grammar-translation" approach, as opposed to those of a more "holistic" method placing greater emphasis on natural immersion within L1 speech. The debate between these two approaches to L2 revitalization is crucial in Kanien'kéha immersion programs today, as it frames curriculum contents at all levels, and thus deserves to be mentioned here. It is no surprise that investigating idiomatic expressions led us to that topic, as they are, as we have seen, a prime example of the oft-mentioned "extra level of authentic proficiency" which forms the crux of this debate between the two L2 revitalization strategies.

The grammar-translation approach is characterized by a focus on the polysynthetic grammatical structure of the language: L2 learners are taught individual atomic morphemes, as well as systematic rules for combining these into grammatically well-formed words. This is also known as the "Root Word Method" (Green and O. Maracle, 2018; Renard, 2022). This teaching method therefore necessarily involves a significant amount of explicit explanations of technical grammatical terms and mechanisms. It is designed to provide students with a foundational understanding of the structure of the language, based on which they are in principle able to exponentially increase the number of forms they can produce, as each new morpheme that is acquired can be inserted into the morphological patterns already known. This method is often understood as historically deriving from the traditional way of teaching classical languages (i.e., Ancient Greek and Latin) in Western education during the 19th century, although this has been challenged as speculative (Carvajal, 2013).

The holistic approach, on the other hand, promotes a more contextually and culturally-embedded L2 teaching method; perhaps even emulating some aspects of natural inter-generational L1 acquisition: L2 learners are exposed to L1 speech through dialogues and speeches, within a community context and as part of traditional activities, and are encouraged to figure out patterns for themselves without going through the metalanguage. Crucially, the amount of explicit grammatical teaching is significantly reduced, as priority is given to immersion within authentic speech. This means that learners may be unable to decompose forms that students using the grammar-translation learn to break down into morphemes, as they rather acquire words as whole fixed forms.

These two approaches therefore differ in several key ways. First, as we have seen, they have different foci, namely grammar teaching as opposed to L1 immersion. Second, they rely on different assumptions about the best way to master a language: while the grammar-translation approach promotes language learning (i.e., a conscious process of word construction); the holistic approach promotes language acquisition (i.e., a subconscious process of pattern recognition) (Krashen, 1982).

Finally, they operate on different primary levels: the grammar-translation approach focuses on a low structural level, usually individual morphemes, which facilitates grammatical learning but impedes the acquisition of lexicalized forms (e.g., idiomatic expressions); whereas the holistic approach focuses on a high structural level, namely whole words or even phrases, which favours the acquisition of lexicalized idioms but makes the recognition of grammatical patterns more challenging.

The holistic approach was widespread in the early days of Kanien'kéha language revitalization in the 1970s, and can be seen in multiple textbooks from this period (e.g., Deering and Harries-Delisle, 1976), as well as in language programs such as the Akwesáhsne Freedom School, founded in 1979 (White, 2015). The grammar-translation method was then developed starting in the late 1980s, partly in response to the perceived limitations of the holistic method, such as inconcrete or ineffective grammatical teaching. Grammar-translation approaches later grew in popularity during the 1990s, with the development of the Root Word Method by Kanatawákhon Maracle at the Centre for the Research and Teaching of Native Canadian Languages at the University of Western Ontario, and then especially over the last two decades, with their expansion as part of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa curriculum (Green and O. Maracle, 2018, p. 147); although Brant (p.c.) points out that morpheme-based analyses of the language have been in use by linguists and even missionaries for much longer. The holistic approach never stopped being used altogether, however, as many programs still incorporate a significant L1 speech component.

These two approaches are not binary opposites, but rather the two extremes of a continuum, with all immersion programs lying somewhere in-between. The question that now emerges is that of how to decide which position to take along this continuum. For TB, addressing this issue requires language-ideological clarification à la Kroskrity (2009):

(35) Language-ideological clarification

"One of the problems in language revitalization work is that we're really not clear on what our goals are. Is our goal to create all of these linguists in the language? Because we're doing a fantastic job of that right now. […] So are we teaching them to talk about the language, or are we teaching them to speak the language? […] And I think what's important is to understand the impact of that. Is the impact on speed? Because that's one of the arguments, that the root-word methodology increases the speed in which someone can acquire Kanien'kéha. Is speed the most important thing in language-learning? Or is it accuracy? So where does it come in, this authentic language?" (TB)

TB argues that, in order to make an informed decision concerning which strategy to select, communities must first engage in language-ideological clarification (ibid.) to clarify their goal. Issues often arise when this is not done, as there is no consistent benchmark against which to assess progress. Doing so, however, can reveal interesting tendencies: while the grammar-translation approach enhances the speed and ease of acquisition by enabling learners to quickly construct a large amount of grammatically correct words based on a small amount of known morphemes, the holistic approach enhances L2 "accuracy" (i.e., authenticity) by immersing students in authentic language. A decision between these two methods thus often amounts to a choice between these two goals.

Of course, choosing one thing implies sacrificing the other to some extent. If speed and ease are given priority and the grammar-translation approach is used, then the language used by learners may be less authentic at times. For instance, students in immersion programs using the grammar-translation approach may sometimes over-generalize, and construct a word that is predicted to be grammatically correct by the system of morphemes and combinatorial rules that they have learned, but which happens to be overridden by a suppletive or irregular form in L1 speech, or may even be absent from it altogether (Renard, 2022, p. 51–52). For instance, the nominal root -*nahskw*- ('domestic animal') cannot be modified by possessive prefixes (e.g., **ak-nahskw-a* ; 1SG.POSS.AL-domestic .animal-NSF ; 'my animal'), although this violates no obvious grammatical rule, and so L2 speakers who learned through a grammar-translation approach sometimes use such forms anyway (although this kind of mistakes could be easily rectified through interaction with L1s, as we saw in Section 4.4).

Inversely, if authenticity is seen as higher priority and a more holistic method is implemented, then it might take longer and be more difficult for L2 learners to become highly proficient, especially in the initial stages as they receive no instruction as to how to parse incoming input. In practice, each community within a larger speech community may make a different language-ideological decision concerning which position to take along this continuum, in light of the local linguistic and sociopolitical reality. Thus, while Western communities (Tyendinaga and Ohswé:ken) tend to favour the grammar-translation approach because they lack L1 speakers and want to re-create L2 speakers as fast as possible, Eastern communities (Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke, and Akwesáhsne) rather lean towards the holistic approach as they have easy access to L1 speakers and more stable speech communities.

Each approach also raises some additional issues. We have already mentioned in Section 4.2 the problem of incomprehensibility for the grammar-translation method: if they acquire the language through a method that prioritizes grammar and speed at the expense of extensive embedding in community contexts and culturally authentic native-like speech, students might lack a final layer of proficiency and be subject to significant influences from their L1, making communication with native

speakers difficult despite their conscious mastery of the grammar. The staff of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa language immersion school in Ohswé:ken explicitly acknowledges these limitations:

(36) Issues of the grammar-translation approach

"RWM [the Root-Word Method; MR] focuses initially on developing knowledge of morphology and syntax. Learners are able to speak using words, sentences, and strings of sentences in the target language. Restricted mainly to classroom contexts, learning activities are not embedded within a community context (Skinner, 1957) and focus more so on grammatical correctness rather than native speaker-like semantics, prosody, and pragmatics. Learners often lack knowledge of colloquial expressions, idioms, contractions, and slang and demonstrate difficulty communicating when interacting with unsympathetic native speakers."

(Green and O. Maracle, 2018, p. 149)

Green and O. Maracle (ibid.) later mention that "communicative language teaching methods are being used in programs organized using RWM to address these limitations". "Communicative language teaching methods" involve teaching the language through direct interaction rather than grammatical drills (Littlewood, 1981). Further research is required to determine the efficiency of such methods.

TB also mentions an additional problem of this approach:

(37) Further issue of the grammar-translation approach

"One of the struggles that I have is the cultural disconnect with our adult learning programs. […] I know that using the grammar and root-based approach, to me, it doesn't capture the inclusivity that is imperative in our language. Learning with that mindset might be a total shift from the mindset of a first language speaker. […] So, again, it's this Western education ideology, where we use a grammar-translation approach for us to learn a language that's not aligned with those philosophies." (TB)

For TB, the grammar-translation method might not be completely philosophically and culturally adapted to the teaching of an Indigenous language like Kanien'kéha, because, as mentioned in

Section 4.1, speaking Kanien'kéha requires a corresponding Kanien'kehá:ka "mindset" or "worldview" that tends to be less prominent within a grammar-focused immersion curriculum. More generally, this approach might sometimes be problematic because it is based in a "Western education ideology" (especially if it is true that it derives from 19th-century classical language teaching methods; see above), which is "not aligned with those [Kanien'kehá:ka] philosophies".

As for additional problems of the holistic method, we have already mentioned in Section 4.4 that it might sometimes be practically difficult to access native speaker knowledge, for instance if there are simply no L1s left in one's community and one wants to revitalize the local dialect; or if L1 speakers from another community are too elderly to move for long periods of time and L2 learners cannot move to this community either due to family or professional ties to their home community. It is also easy to imagine that, if an adult were simply thrown into an L1 immersion environment with no knowledge of the language and no explicit instruction whatsoever, it would be very difficult to acquire anything, at least at first. This is related to the issue of speed above: initial progress would be very slow, as incoming input would be completely incomprehensible (see Krashen's (1982) "comprehensible input"), and that is why Kanien'kéha immersion programs usually take a laddered approach from simpler to more complex (DeCaire p.c.). Of course, this is merely an extreme hypothetical scenario, as it never happens in Kanien'kehá:ka communities nowadays, and was not mentioned by any participant.

We have seen that both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, suggesting that there is no sense in which one is inherently better or worse than the other. In fact, TB insists that there is no single solution to the difficulties that L2 learners face, as "one approach is going to work with some people, but might not for others". Moreover, both approaches have proved very successful in practice, despite their various limitations. TB remarks, however, that there is one generally promising way forward, namely to find an appropriate balance between them:

(38) Balancing the two approaches

"Is there a way that this grammar-translation root-based approach and a natural language acquisition approach […] can mix? Maybe there's a middle ground, where we might enhance speed, but we definitely will enhance comprehensibility and accuracy and authenticity in the language. And I think that's the way! If we take a look at our most proficient adult second language learners, they graduated from Onkwawén:na and then moved to Kahnawà:ke." (TB)

Thus, perhaps the best strategy is to combine the strengths of both approaches: by striking an adequate middle ground between the grammatical rigor of the grammar-translation approach and the natural L1 input of the holistic approach, immersion programs would allow learners to both speed up their initial language acquisition through morphosyntactic bootstrapping, and enhance the ultimate authenticity of their speech by correcting any over-generalizations and filling in any idiomatic gaps thanks to exposure to L1 speech. The effectiveness of this dual approach is evidenced by the fact that it is precisely what the currently most proficient L2 speakers (like Oheróhskon Ryan DeCaire) have done, as was mentioned in Section 4.4 (Green and O. Maracle, 2018, p. 149): they first attended a grammar-focused immersion program to gain this foundational knowledge, and then moved to an L1 community in order to be exposed to authentic speech and iron out any "deviations" in their language.

Some adult immersion programs are already following this strategy, and are highly successful as a result. For instance, the Kanien'kéha Ratiwennahní:rats program in Kahnawà:ke accommodates both "total immersion" (i.e., the holistic approach) and "grammar lessons" (i.e., the grammar-translation approach)[8]. Similarly, when funding permits it, the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa school in Ohswé:ken operates after its first two grammar-intensive years a third-year program, which involves extensive interaction with L1 speakers (see 29b). This dual approach still has to face various obstacles (e.g., absence of L1 speakers, dialectal variation, etc.); but it seems to remain the best compromise in order to maximize both the speed and ease of L2 acquisition, in light of the urgency of the situation, and the ultimate authenticity of L2 speech, given that the new L1 children raised by these L2 speakers may be determining the shape of the language for decades to come.

6. CONCLUSION

This work examined the issue of L2 revitalization in Kanien'kéha through the case study of idioms. Specifically, we tried to identify the implications of these expressions for the re-establishment of inter-generational transmission in Kanien'kéha, through the creation in adult immersion programs of L2 speakers capable of transmitting an authentic form of the language to a next generation of "new" L1 speakers. After presenting background information on revitalization projects and idiomaticity patterns in Kanien'kéha, we focused on four specific issues raised during discussions with speakers.

First, participants insisted that idiomatic expressions carry out crucial expressive, humoristic, phatic, and cultural functions in Kanien'kéha, and should therefore be preserved as part of the authentic language to revitalize. Second, we saw that speakers generally equate authentic Kanien'kéha with L1 speech and uphold it as the target of revitalization, but remark that L2 speech is often less authentic when it comes to these idioms, to the point where it might impede

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[8] See the program's website at https://www.korkahnawake.org/kanienkha-ratiwennahnrats.

comprehensibility for L1 speakers. Third, participants mentioned a few key challenges that idiomatic expressions create for L2 learners, especially in terms of memorization and usage. Finally, we summarized some proposals put forward by speakers concerning potential ways to facilitate the L2 acquisition of these expressions, such as explicit teaching, project-based learning, and contextual learning, and noticed that they insisted particularly strongly on the benefits of exposure to L1 speech.

We then ended the work by opening up the discussion to a broader debate between two approaches to L2 revitalization that were frequently mentioned during the focus groups, namely the "grammar-translation" approach and the "holistic" approach. One participant in particular insisted that, ideally, immersion programs should combine these two approaches, in order to benefit from both the grammatical rigor of the former, and the focus on embedding in native speech of the latter. However, it was also mentioned that there is no "one-size-fits-all" model of L2 revitalization, and that the strategy to employ in each community will depend on the local reality, for instance on whether students have easy access to L1 speaker knowledge or not.

Crucially, as was repeated several times throughout this work, we focused on idiomatic expressions not for their own sake, but rather as a case study of a much larger phenomenon, whereby L2 learners often face tremendous difficulties post-immersion in acquiring a final layer of proficiency and suppressing L1 interference in order to sound truly authentic. Given that, according to the current L2 revitalization strategy, these young adult L2 speakers (rather than elder L1s) will have to re-establish inter-generational transmission themselves by raising new L1 children, and that the target of these revitalization efforts is authentic L1-like Kanien'kéha, immersion programs must do (and are doing) everything they can to bridge this proficiency gap and maximize the authenticity of the L2 speakers they create. Participants were acutely aware of this, and constantly related their specific points concerning idiomatic expressions to this bigger picture. In this sense, it is my hope that this case study will have shed some light on this larger issue, and may thus find useful applications outside of its narrow focus; given that one of its primary goals was to concretely contribute to the revitalization of Kanien'kéha by clarifying the challenges at play in this issue and suggest potential solutions to them. All of this is not to say that Kanien'kéha idioms are not interesting in their own right. Indeed, although that would be a different topic from the one pursued here, more research is needed on Kanien'kéha idioms; especially in terms of their inherent importance to Kanien'kéha speech, and of the potential changes that they will undergo as the L2 revitalization of the language progresses.

The findings of this study, however, should always be appreciated against a clear perception of the complexity of language endangerment situations. In particular, it is important to keep in mind that these contexts are in constant evolution, and that, therefore, so should be the revitalization strategies

designed and / or recommended in response to them, so that they remain relevant and effective. That is probably why TB also mentioned the need for self-reflection:

(39) The necessity for a reflexive turn

"The cool thing about having this experience with so many graduates of root-based approaches is that it's afforded us an opportunity to learn a lot from them. Maybe this is one of the most important learnings. We need to be reflexive in our practice, we need to learn from our learners, our speakers, our teachers, to see what's working and what's not working." (TB)

This work has in a sense been an attempt at answering this call, by consulting various Kanien'kéha language workers and synthesizing their expert opinions in order to inform future revitalization practices. Thus, although I hope that the findings summarized in this work will be found helpful and actionable by Kanien'kéha immersion programs in the current context, further research may become necessary as the revitalization of the language hopefully moves forward and the situation shifts.

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