Introduction. The aspectual system in Kanien'kéha and other Northern Iroquoian languages shows a split morphological behaviour: perfective verbs require modal inflection (such as the Factual *wa'*-) but no overt tense inflection (1), whereas the two non-perfective aspects (imperfective and perfect) optionally permit overt tense inflection (such as the Past *-kwe'*) but no modal inflection (2).

(1) **Perfective aspect verb**

a. wa'katá:wen'
wa'-k-atawen-**'**
FACT-1SGA-swim-PFV
'I swam.'

b. *katá:wen'
k-atawen-**'**
1SGA-swim-PFV
Intended: 'I swam.'

(2) **Imperfective aspect verb**

a. *wa'katá:wens(kwe')
wa'-k-atawen-**s-kwe'**
FACT-1SGA-swim-IPFV-PAST
Intended: 'I used to swim (habitually).'

b. katá:wens(kwe')
k-atawen-**s-kwe'**
1SGA-swim-IPFV-PAST
'I used to swim (habitually).'

I argue that this asymmetry reveals a deeper difference in the syntax and semantics of the aspects, building on work by Baker and Travis (1997, 1998). Specifically, I argue ① that non-perfective aspects are always tensed (either overtly or covertly), and ② the perfective aspect lacks tense entirely. Moreover, I provide a new empirical argument for the second claim using data from counterfactual conditional constructions.

Counterfactual conditionals as a tense diagnostic. The overt counterfactual marker in Kanien'kéha is the modal Optative prefix, as shown in (3a), marked on verbs in both the antecedent and consequent clauses. Indicative conditions, on the other hand, use the same verb form as in matrix clauses, as shown in (3b).

(3) a. Tóka **a-ho-ks-oharé-nion** ne Kó:r,
if OPT-MSGP-dish-wash-DISTR.PERF NE Kor
iah ki th-a-ionkwa-nahskw-aién:t-ake' ne tsí'ks!
NEG just NEG-OPT-1PL.EXP-pet-have.PERF-CONT NE fly
'If Kó:r *had washed* the dishes, we wouldn't have flies.'

b. Tóka' Kó:r **wa-ha-ks-oharé-nion-'**, Shawátis wa'-t-ha-at-ónhew-e'
if Kor FACT-MSGA-dish-wash-DISTR-PFV Shawatis FACT-DUPL-MSGA-SR-sweep-PFV
'If Kó:r *washed* the dishes, then Shawatis swept the floor.'

As seen from this data, Optative-marked *non-perfective aspect* forms give rise to counterfactuality across past, present, and future temporal reference. Strikingly, Optative-marked *perfective aspect forms*, only an "open future" (a Future Less Vivid meaning) is possible; no counterfactual meanings are available. See Table 1. From this, I argue that the counterfactual marker is in fact bi-morphemic in Kanien'kéha: the overt Optative prefix and a (covert) Past is needed to derive counterfactuality.

This account puts Kanien'kéha unexpectedly in the class of languages that use Past tense to express counterfactuality (e.g., Iatridou 2000; Ippolito 2014; Mirrazi 2022; von Fintel and Iatridou 2023). When tense is unavailable as with the perfective aspect, counterfactual meaning is ruled out. I provide an account for such data along the lines of a "PAST-as-past" theory of counterfactual conditionals, which holds that the use of past morphology reveals that *temporal anteriority* is a crucial component to deriving counterfactual meanings.

Some consequences. The asymmetry seen with counterfactual conditionals provides a new piece of evidence for a tensed analysis of the non-perfective aspects, and a non-tensed analysis of the perfective aspect; a uniformly tensed analysis struggles to capture this asymmetry. The resulting picture is a view of Kanien'kéha as a language where aspect splits the downstream derivation into modal but non-temporal inflection on one hand, and temporal but non-modal inflection on the other.

Table 1: Morphology in counterfactual conditionals

		counterfactual		
ASP	MOD	*past*	*pres.*	*closed fut.*
PUNC	FACT/FUT	#	#	#
	OPT	#	#	#
STAT/HAB	∅/FUT	#	#	#
	OPT	✓	✓	✓

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