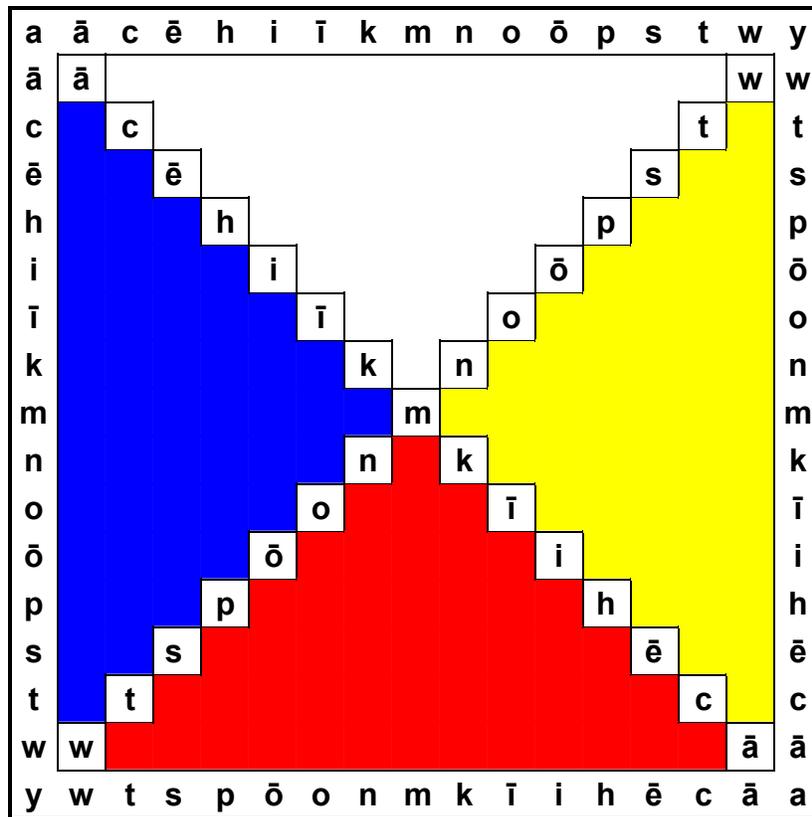


How to Spell it in Cree

(The Standard Roman Orthography)



Jean Okimāsis and Arok Wolvengrey

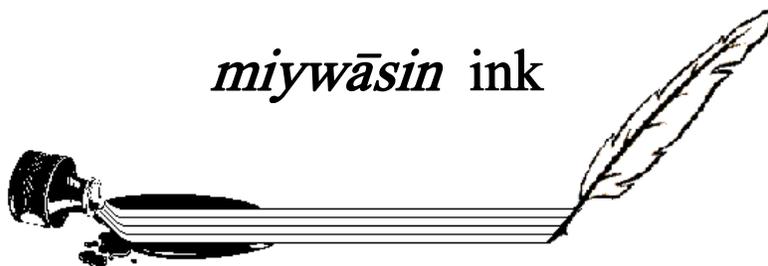
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Introduction: Cree and the Standard Roman Orthography

Throughout the years, many different attempts have been made to write the Cree language using the Roman Alphabet. This has usually been done based solely on some knowledge of English (or French) usage and has, as such, resulted in almost as many different spellings for a single word as the number of people trying to write it. For instance, records made in the 18th century in the area of Hudson Bay (cf. Houston et al, 2003: 239-244) gave a variety of spellings for relatively simple eastern Cree words. Examples include:

<i>amisk</i>	“beaver”	written as	“amisk”, “ammisk”, “aumisk”, and “omisk”
<i>kākwā</i>	“porcupine”	as	“caqua”, “cawqua”, “cawquaw”, and “coquaw”
<i>pišiw</i>	“lynx”	as	“peeshoo”, “peshew”, “pir shuee”, and “pisshu”
<i>šākwēš</i>	“mink; ermine”	as	“atjakashew”, “sac quaw sue”, “shacooshew”, “shacushue”, or <i>šākwēšiw</i>
			“shakwaeshew”, “shakweshue”, “shekeshu”, and “jackash”

All of these variations point to the problems of using English letters to approximate the sounds of another language. Using the English spelling system consistently is difficult enough for English speakers writing English. Seeking to harness its numerous conventions and idiosyncracies to consistently write another language, with different sounds and therefore different needs, is hardly possible for a single writer, let alone a large number of individuals working without a standard system.

Attempts have also certainly been made to achieve a standard by choosing some perceived English norm. But what exactly is the normal sound of any given letter? If we take the letter “e”, for instance, what is its sound? Most are likely to say that this is the “ee” sound (or what linguists would represent as /i/) as in English *me* or *see*. But already we have two different ways to spell this sound: “e” and “ee”. In fact, this single sound in English can be and is spelled in a rather bewildering number of ways:

/i/ *me*, *see*, *cede*, *sea*, *Ceesar*, *seize*, *brief*, *people*, *amoeba*, *key*, *lady*, *trio*, *police*

Furthermore, the letter “e” is not restricted to the /i/ or so-called “e”-sound of English, nor are many of the letter combinations demonstrated above:¹

“e” as [ɛ] in *shell*; as [ɪ] in *English*; as [ə] in *element*; as [Ø] in *weave*
“ea” as [ɛ] in *health*; as [e] in *great*; etc.

Even these few examples show how unpredictable this symbol is in English. Though there is nothing inherently wrong with the symbol “e”, its multiple uses in English can cause confusion when this letter is chosen. The problem thus remains in basing another language’s writing system on English convention. This simply should not be done. An appropriate standard can only be found once the idiosyncracies of English are completely abandoned and ignored, for there is nothing sacred about the way the alphabet is used to write English. This does not,

¹Symbols inside square brackets ([]) are linguistic representations of the exact phonetic (sound) quality and are not meant to represent English spelling or the SRO.

however, mean that the alphabet must be abandoned altogether. The symbols that make up the alphabet, including “e”, are very useful as long as their use for any individual language is specific to that language, without any necessary influence from English.

As an answer to this problem, the Standard Roman Orthography (SRO) has been designed (and refined over the past 80 years) specifically to meet the needs of the Cree sound system. Though the SRO does utilize the symbols of the Roman Alphabet, it is **not** based on the orthography (or writing system) of any other single language, and is most certainly not based on the English spelling system. It gets its name from the fact that it is meant to be the standard orthography for Cree utilizing the symbols of the Roman Alphabet.² The use of those symbols, however, is just as unique to Cree as the sound system it is meant to capture.

Because the SRO is an attempt to represent the Cree sound system, it is itself systematic and takes into consideration far more than simply the “sounds” one hears. Of course, a sound system consists of the sounds of a language, but the important sounds (or **phonemes**) of a language are not the same as the detailed variation of sounds (or **phones**) that are actually heard during speech. Even the exact pronunciation of a single word by the same speaker at two different times can vary. For instance, I might pronounce the word “just” as [ʃʌst] or more rapidly as [ʃɪst]. But this does not mean we need to spell the word differently each time it is used. Consistent spelling here usefully captures consistent meaning at the expense of a very small sound difference. When regional and dialectal difference are also taken into account, the same important sounds can vary a great deal. This oral variation must be respected when speaking or learning to speak a language or a particular dialect of a language. However, the more that such variation is codified in the spelling system, the less useful that system becomes for sharing written material across communities over large areas, obscuring as it does the essential meaning intended. For this reason, an effective spelling system need not capture the exact sounds (**phones**) of speech. It captures instead the sound system, often ignoring some of the surface variation.

Note, for instance, the English spelling “tomato”. Regardless of whether you say [təméyto]/{tuh MAY toe} or I say [təmáto]/{tuh MAH to}, we both spell it “tomato”. When reading or writing, we all understand what is meant, regardless of the possible differences (often very great) in English dialect. In this way, the English spelling system works for English, but only through long history and convention specific to the English language and it is not appropriate to transfer or force this onto any other language. On the other hand, the very fact that English has a standard spelling system, respected by all who use it, has contributed greatly to the status of English as a dominant world language. Only in this way should English be seen as a model. A standard spelling system can contribute greatly to the status of a language, promoting if not ensuring its continued use. In the same way, a standard spelling system for Cree can be of great benefit to the very survival of the Cree language. The SRO is just such a standard system, meant specifically for Cree.

It follows, to the great chagrin of those who want the simplest possible answer, that using the SRO properly is not just a simple matter of writing exactly what you think you hear. There are rules involved, albeit far fewer and far more systematic ones than those of the English spelling system. These relatively easy rules will be introduced, discussed and exemplified in the

²As such, it could just as well be known as the Standard Cree Alphabet, in contrast, for instance, to a standard use of the Cree Syllabics or Standard Cree Syllabary. These are two very different but equally valid systems for writing Cree, each with its own strengths. Cree Syllabics will not, however, be discussed in this volume.

following sections of this book, but it is hoped that the reasons for using a standard writing system will already be clear. Without a standard orthography, great amounts of work must be duplicated many times over, each work becomes limited in its usefulness to one small region or, at the worst, to a single individual, and otherwise excellent material ends up unusable by the majority. A standard writing system makes each work vastly more accessible and able to be shared over a much wider area, reducing the time wasted on “recreating the wheel” (or rewriting the same material). This, in turn, increases the potential earning power of each work produced, and allows the scarce funds available for the production of language materials to be stretched that much further with greater results and returns. With a standard orthography in place, the availability of much needed language materials and all manner of other information in Cree will flourish, and serve as a demonstrable means of increasing the prestige of the Cree language and the pride that Cree people can take therein.

Ultimately, a standard orthography is also essential to the possibility of having Cree recognized as an official language. It is time to stop worrying about simply preserving the Cree language. It is time to promote its use as an official and vital language of Saskatchewan and beyond. It is time to show our pride in this beautiful language indigenous to our land. To use the same tools that have allowed English, through its very usefulness, to threaten the existence of so many languages of the world. To use those same tools to say (and write) *nahiyikohk!* When you consider how much time and effort everyone puts into learning to spell and write properly in English, and view this in terms of the vast amount of respect one pays thereby to the English language, one thing is clear: Cree is just as worthy of that respect. With that in mind ...

āhkami-nēhiyawētān

ēkwa mīna

māci-nēhiyawasinahikētān!

What Not to Use

2.1 English Symbols

Though there are dialect differences, there are 17 distinct sounds in each of the Plains (Y), Woods (TH), and Swampy (N) Cree dialects. In order to represent these sounds, only 14 letters of the English alphabet are used to write Cree. The following symbols are **never** used for writing Cree:

b, d, f, g, j, q, u, v, x, z

If any of these symbols are found in attempts to write Cree in the standard orthography, it is incorrect. As an example, the letter “g” is often chosen in attempts to spell Cree words (in place of the correct **k**, as described in the next chapter). This is often justified by stating that ‘it sounds like a “g”’. But what does a “g” sound like? Is it the “g” of “**g**ill” or the “g” of “**g**in”? Or perhaps the “g” of “**g**orge”, “**g**orgeous”, and “**g**arage”? You might well ask which one and that is precisely the point. In English, when the letter “g” occurs before “i” or “e”, it is usually pronounced the same as “j” is elsewhere (though “**g**ill” is an exception as it does not sound like “**J**ill”), while it has the “hard-g” sound (as in “**e**gg”) in other positions. But it can also be pronounced like the “s(i)” in “**l**eisure” or “**v**ision” as in some pronunciations of the second “g” of “**g**arage”, or in “**g**enre” and other borrowings from French. The letter “g” is simply too variable, misleading and unnecessary a symbol for use in Cree spelling, and thus we never use it.

Additionally, the symbols **l** and **r** are only used for words borrowed into Cree, where those sounds are retained, or in the Moose (L) and Attikamek (R) dialects. Cree simply has fewer distinct sounds than English does, so fewer symbols are needed.

2.2 English Digraphs

In contrast, English actually has many more distinct sounds than we have alphabetic symbols to represent them (for example: 26 symbols are used to represent 38 distinct sounds in English as spoken in western Canada). To make up for this deficiency, a number of symbol combinations or **digraphs** are used for individual sounds in English. The examples that follow are English digraphs, none of which are ever used in writing Cree:

ch, sh, tch, ng, ph, gh, bb, cc, dd, ff, gg, ck, ll, mm, nn, pp, rr, ss, tt, zz

aa, ae, ai, ao, au, ea, ee, ei, eo, eu, ia, ie, ii, io, iu, oa, oe, oi, oo, ou, ua, ue, ui, uo, uu

- If a dialect has a sound similar to English “ch”, this is represented by the symbol **C** alone.
- If a dialect has a sound similar to English “sh”, the symbol **Š** is used. (This is the case, for instance in eastern dialects, or in Saulteaux/Ojibway, but western Cree dialects do not have pairs of words that differ by a contrast of the **s** and **š** sounds, so both symbols are not needed).
- Absolutely no combinations of vowels are ever used. The only times two Cree vowel sounds occur next to each other are across word or compound boundaries (for example: *ana astis*; *kēhtē-aya*). No two vowels are ever written side by side in the same word. If a vowel is long, then the single symbol is marked as long (by a macron (**ā**) or circumflex (**â**); see below). Double vowels are never used.

- Absolutely no double consonants are ever used. In rapid speech, two identical sounds may collapse together (e.g. [nkíssun]³ “I am hot”), but the spelling system recognizes the expanded or non-collapsed form (i.e. *nikisison*).
- The only digraph that occurs anywhere in Cree spelling is the use of “th” when writing the [ð] sound (as in English “this” or “then”) in the Woods Cree dialect.
- Other consonant combinations are possible, but these are actual occurrences of two distinct Cree sounds and, therefore, they are not digraphs (i.e. two symbols representing one single sound). Consonant combinations will be discussed below in section 3.2.2.

2.3 English Capitalization

Thus far all of the symbols discussed have been lower case. We can double the number of distinct symbols available by using capital letters as well. However, languages differ as to how capitalization is utilized. For instance, English uses capital letters for certain names and titles, as well as at the beginning of sentences. German, on the other hand, also uses capitalization for all nouns. Some equally arbitrary conventions could easily be invented for Cree (for instance, capitalizing only animate nouns, etc.). The point is simply that the English conventions of capitalization are neither universal nor essential. Note also that these symbols are completely superfluous, each representing the exact same sound as its corresponding lower case symbol. Thus, when we use both upper and lower case letters, we are actually using two symbols for a single sound depending not on any sound difference but merely on where the sound occurs (i.e. in a name, in a noun, at the beginning of an utterance, etc.).

In contrast, one of the overriding principles in the design of the SRO is to have a single symbol for each important sound of the Cree sound system. Using both upper and lower case symbols, leading to two distinct spellings for many if not all words, would defeat the purpose. In an attempt to adhere to the original principle and minimize the number of spelling rules, a very simple solution is possible: **no** capitalization is ever used in writing in Cree. As sentence breaks are already marked by punctuation (i.e. a period and spacing), capitals are not at all necessary. This actually matches well with Cree Syllabics where the same spelling is used for words regardless of their position in the sentence or utterance. It is, in fact, not possible to capitalize names, etc., in Cree Syllabics - the spelling will be the same regardless of whether it is a simple word or someone’s name (e.g. ᓄᓐᓂᓐ is *maskwa*, whether in reference to a “bear” or someone whose name might be (mis)spelled in English as “Musqua”). Given the wholistic world view of the Cree and First Nations people in general, such a spelling convention can even be viewed as a very appropriate and egalitarian choice in which nothing is singled out or marked for special attention or status by any special use of symbols such as capitalization. The result is a spelling system in which the only spelling rule regarding capitalization is very easy to learn:

never use capitalization!

2.4 Conclusion

Thus, in the design of a Cree-specific writing system, we have been able to eliminate a large number of superfluous English symbols and digraphs, as well as capitalization. The result is that only 14 letters of the English alphabet are needed to properly represent the 17 sounds of the western dialects of Cree in an elegant and consistent way. This system will be introduced in the following chapter.

³The acute accent (´) in [nkíssun] indicates primary stress. See further discussion of stress in chapters 3 and 4.

What to Use to Spell in Cree⁴

3.1 The Sounds of Cree

In Plains and Swampy Cree, there are 10 distinct consonants. Woods Cree adds the aforementioned [ð] or “th” sound.

3.1.1 Consonants - c, h, k, m, n, p, s, t, w, y

- The consonants **h**, **m**, **n**, **s**, **w**, and **y** are all pronounced virtually the same as their English counterparts.

- The consonants **c**, **k**, **p**, and **t** are not pronounced exactly like their English counterparts. Note the following examples:

- **c** varies in pronunciation. In many areas of Plains Cree, it is pronounced like the “**ts**” in the English word “**cats**”. In other dialects, it may be closer to the English “**ch**” sound in “**catch**”. This is a fact about each dialect, but the variation is not an issue for the Cree language as a whole. No meaning difference depends on the variation of “**ts**” and “**ch**” in Cree, which is to say that no pairs of Cree words will differ solely by an alternation of “**ts**” and “**ch**” sounds. Thus, only one symbol is needed and the digraph “**ch**” is never used. Furthermore, “**c**” is never used to represent a “**k**” sound like it does in “**cook**” or an “**s**” sound in “**cent**”, or both of these sounds in words like “**circus**” or “**circle**”. One symbol for the one important sound.
- **k** is pronounced like the sound in English “**skill**”. Its sound is somewhere between the “**k**” in “**kill**” and the “**g**” in “**gill**”. Again, the exact quality may vary between what sounds like English “**k**” and “**g**” sounds, but this is not an important difference in Cree: no pair of words will ever differ in Cree by interchanging these sounds. Thus, only one of the symbols is necessary. If in doubt, use **k**. “**g**” is never used.
- **p** is pronounced like the sound in English “**spill**”. Its sound is somewhere between the “**p**” in “**pill**” and the “**b**” in “**bill**”. As with **k**, the Cree **p** sound may vary between the two English sounds, but the difference is not important for Cree. It is an English artifact and not one that we need to pay attention to. If in doubt, use **p**. “**b**” is never used.
- **t** is pronounced like the sound in English “**still**”. Its sound is somewhere between the “**t**” in “**till**” and the “**d**” in “**dill**”. Again, the Cree **t** sound may vary between the two English sounds, but the difference is not important for Cree. If in doubt, use **t**. “**d**” is never used.

Examples:	<u>Initially</u>	<u>Medially</u>	<u>Finally</u>
	<u>c</u> ēs ^h kwa - “wait!”	aki <u>h</u> ci <u>k</u> ē - “count!”	anoh <u>ç</u> - “now/today”
	<u>k</u> īspin - “if”	aki <u>h</u> ci <u>k</u> ē - “count!”	nik <u>k</u> - “otter”
	<u>p</u> ēhin - “wait for me!”	nā <u>p</u> ēw - “man”	sī <u>s</u> ī <u>p</u> - “duck”
	<u>t</u> āpwē - “truly/really”	ā <u>t</u> a - “although”	nis <u>t</u> - “my foot”

⁴Much of the content of this chapter is a modification of the discussion found in the introductory material of Wolvengrey 2001, *nēhiyawēwin: itwēwina / Cree: Words*.

The only other consonant sound in the western dialects is the “th” sound in Woods Cree. This is the only digraph borrowed from English. Ideally, it too would be replaced by a different symbol, since both “t” and “h” are used in Cree for sounds that have nothing to do with the [ð] or so-called “th” sound. (In some more recent materials, especially in Manitoba, the symbol **ᑖ** has, in fact, been used).

- **th** is usually pronounced like the sound in English “this”, not like English “thin”.

thōtin - “it’s windy” pithīw - “spruce grouse” namīpith - “sucker”

The [ð] sound of the Woods dialect alternates with [y] in Plains Cree and [n] in Swampy Cree. For this reason, Plains and/or Swampy materials prepared to be as cross-dialectally applicable as possible will mark the Plains [y] or Swampy [n] corresponding with Woods [ð]. For Plains Cree, this usually means placing an accent over the “y” symbol (ý), while in Swampy the “n” with tilde (ñ) has often been used. In this Plains Cree manual, ý is used when appropriate, but note that not all instances of the [y] sound in Plains Cree correspond to Woods Cree [ð] or Swampy [n], while Plains Cree readers can ignore the difference between “y” and “ý”.

3.1.2 Vowels - a, í, o, ā, ē, ī, ō

In (southern) Plains and Swampy Cree, there are 7 distinct vowels. Woods and northern Plains Cree have only 6 (with the omission of ē). Only 4 of the English vowel symbols are needed to represent these 7 distinct Cree vowels, since the vowels can be divided up into short and long pairs, and the long vowels are then specially marked as distinct from the short vowels.

3.1.2.1 Short Vowel Sounds - a, í, o

- **a** sounds like English “a” in “about” and “u” in “up” (but certainly not the “u” of such words as “unique” or “put”; the English “u” symbol is **never** used for writing Cree).
- **í** sounds like English “i” in “in” or “fit”, **never** as in English “fine” or “fight”.
- **o** sounds like the English “o” in “occasion” or the “oo” of “book”, or the “u” of “put”. Note the many different ways that this sound is spelled in English. In Cree, this sound is **o**, and only **o**.

Examples: <u>Initially</u>	<u>Medially</u>	<u>Finally</u>
awas - “go away/get out!”	āstam - “come here!”	otina - “take it!”
iskwēw - “woman”	nīsīt - “my foot”	nahapī - “sit down!”
otina - “take it!”	kotak - “another”	nikamo - “sing!”

3.1.2.2 Long Vowel Sounds - ā, ī, ō, ē

- **ā** sounds something like the “a” in “fa” (as when singing “do, re, me, **fa**, so, la, ti, do”). As the long counterpart to short **a**, it is actually not a sound commonly found in most dialects of English. If, however, you were to pronounce “father” with an Irish accent, this would be much closer to the Cree sound than most English pronunciations of “father”.
- **ī** sounds like the English “i” in “machine”, **never** as in “shine”. This so-called “e” sound has so many different spellings in English (for example: e, ee, ea, ei, eo, ie, i, y, etc.) but one and only one in Cree: **ī**. It is the long counterpart to short **i**.
- **ō** usually sounds like the English “o” in “so” or “oa” in “boat” (or better yet, “oo” in

German “**Boo**t” “boat”). It can, however, vary in pronunciation, so that some speakers may use a sound closer to English “oo” is “**moose**”. Regardless, these two variant sounds do not represent an important, meaning-altering difference in Cree and a single symbol is all that is needed. Long **ō** is the counterpart of short **o**.

- **ē** sounds like the English “ay” in “**hay**” or “ai” in “**main**”. This sound has no short counterpart. It is always long, and therefore it is always marked as long (with the macron (**ē**) or circumflex (**ê**)) just as the other long vowels are. Sometimes, as has been common in Alberta, this vowel is written without the length mark. However, this leaves a bare “e” symbol which can be quite misleading, often resulting in confusion over its use between the **ē** and **ī** sounds. Spelling it with the macron or circumflex not only marks this vowel as long, but sets it apart as if to say: This is **not** the English “e”! This vowel is not present in Woods or northern Plains Cree, where **ī** is found in place of the **ē** of other dialects.

Examples:	<u>Initially</u>	<u>Medially</u>	<u>Finally</u>
	ā stam - “come here”	tā nisi - “how/hello”	nip ā - “sleep”
	ī hī - “yes” (Woods Cree)	c ī ki - “near”	tapas ī - “flee”
	ō ki - “these”	p ō na - “make a fire”	pasik ō - “get up!”
	ē sis - “shell”	m ē kwāc - “presently”	kīw ē - “go home!”

Note: the last examples with **ē** will not be pronounced this way in Woods or northern Plains Cree. These dialects will have **ī** in place of **ē**.

3.2 Combinations of Sounds

The 17 distinct sounds of Cree do not occur in isolation. There are a number of very important ways in which sounds are combined which can impact on how the individual sounds are produced.

3.2.1 Vowels and Glides - **h, w, y**

When the vowels occur next to one of the three consonants known as “glides” or “semi-vowels” (**h, w, y**), various modifications can occur in the pronunciation of the basic vowel sounds.

3.2.1.1 **h**

The effect of an “**h**-consonant” cluster (**hC** or “pre-aspirated” consonants, where “**C**” stands for any consonant, e.g. **hp, ht, hc, hk**; see below) on the preceding vowel is very important for, in most cases, the distinction between long and short vowels is neutralized. In other words, it is usually very difficult, if not impossible, to tell the difference between long and short vowels before a combination of “**h**” and another consonant. Before **hC**, long and short vowels seem to merge into a single vowel which is short in duration, but closer to the quality of the long vowel. Hence:

- **ahC** and **āhC** both sound as in English “**fā**” (like **ā**), but shorter in duration (like **a**).
- **ihC** and **īhC** both sound as in English “**beat**” (like **ī**), but shorter in duration (like **i**).
- **ohC** and **ōhC** both sound as in English “**boat**” (like **ō**), but shorter in duration (like **o**).

This description of the effect of **h** on vowels holds for Plains and some areas of Woods Cree. In other areas of Woods Cree and many areas of Swampy Cree speech, however, a different sound change is occurring. Instead of causing long and short vowels to neutralize (as

essentially short vowels), it is more common in these varieties for the **h** to disappear between a vowel and consonant, and for the vowel to become long. In essence, Plains and some Woods Cree dialects are neutralizing vowel-h-consonant (VhC) sequences to short vowel-hC sequences, while some Woods and Swampy Cree dialects are neutralizing VhC sequences to long vowel-C.

3.2.1.2 W

When following a vowel, **w** often sounds something like the short **o** or long **ō** vowels. It is very similar to these vowels for they are all similar in the place and manner in which they are produced in the mouth, including “rounding” of the lips. **w** has the following effects:

- **aw** as in Canadian English “about”.
- **āw** as in English “wow”, but please note, it is **never** spelled “ow” in Cree.
- **ēw** like a combination of English “ay-oo”, and hence the common attempt to spell Cree words like *nāpēw* (“man”) as “Napayo” in English.
- **īw** this combination varies in pronunciation from a sound similar to that in English “new”, to the sounds of Cree short **o**, or long **ō**. The **w** effectively “rounds” the vowel, making it sound more like the round vowels (**o** and **ō**).
- **īw** like a combination of English “ee-oo”.
- **ow** this combination sounds very much as in English “know”, and it is difficult to tell the difference between short **o** and long **ō**. Before **w**, both vowels sound long. By spelling convention, when no dialect-internal means are available for determining the length of the vowel before **w**, the vowel is spelled as short **o** (e.g. *manitow* “spirit”). Such examples are found mostly in nouns.
- **ōw** this combination sounds very much as in English “know”, and it is difficult to tell the difference between short **o** and long **ō**. Before **w**, both vowels sound long.

3.2.1.3 Y

This sound, when following a vowel, often has a quality much like the short **i** or long **ī** vowels, since these vowels and **y** are very similar in the place and manner in which they are produced in the mouth. In nouns and names, **y** usually only follows short vowels, and it has the following effects:

- **ay** as in Canadian English “bite”.
- **iy** this combination sounds very much like the long **ī**, and it is not possible to tell the difference between short **i** and long **ī** before **y**. Before **y**, both vowels sound long. By spelling convention, where no dialect-internal means are available for determining the length of the vowel before **y**, the vowel will always be spelled as a short **i**. Such examples are generally only found in nouns (and, as a side-effect, the “iy” spelling at the end of words can be used to signal the occurrence of a noun in opposition to any other part of speech; see section 4.3 below).
- **oy** this combination is similar to the sound in English “boy” or “buoy”.

Long vowels may also precede **y** when a suffix beginning with **y** (e.g. *-yān*) is added to a verb stem ending in a long vowel. In such cases, **y** has less effect on the preceding vowel, though again short **i** and long **ī** tend to sound the same before **y**. In verbs, however, it is always possible to determine the length of the vowel by listening to forms of the verb in which **y** does not follow:

\bar{e} -apiyān - “as I'm sitting”	nitapīn - “I sit”	apīk! - “sit!”
\bar{e} -tapasīyān - “as I'm fleeing”	nitapasīn - “I flee”	tapasīk! - “flee!”

Though the exact length of the vowel before **y** may be difficult to determine in the first examples of each set, it becomes obvious in the second and third examples. Thus, the verb *api* “sit” is always spelled with a short vowel **i** and *tapasī* “flee” is always spelled with a long vowel \bar{i} .

The same principle can be used to determine the quality of certain vowels before a **w**.

apiw - “s/he sits”	nitapīn - “I sit”	apīk! - “sit!”
nikamow - “s/he sings”	ninikamon - “I sing”	nikamok! - “sing!”
pasikow - “s/he stands up”	nipasikōn - “I stand up”	pasikōk! - “stand up!”

Though the final vowel may sound like an **o** or an \bar{o} in all three of the initial examples, due to the following **w**, the second and third examples of each set again show the actual quality of the vowel. Thus, *api* “sit” is always spelled with a final short vowel **i**, *nikamo* “sing” is always spelled with a final short vowel **o**, and *pasikō* “stand up” is always spelled with a final long vowel \bar{o} .

3.2.2 Consonant Clusters

A consonant cluster is a combination of two or more consonants in a row. There are actually a very limited number of consonant clusters in Cree, with many restrictions as to which sounds can occur together. There are two basic types of two-consonant clusters:

- I. consonant-[w] clusters (abbreviated as **Cw**; e.g. [pw])
- II. fricative-stop clusters (e.g. [sk])

A third even more restricted type simply combines these two types into three-consonant clusters of the type fricative-stop-[w]. (Note: the term fricative here refers to the **h** and **s** sounds of Cree).

3.2.2.1 Two-Consonant Clusters

In the first type, the consonant-[w] clusters, we see that the [w] sound can follow all other consonants. However, some of these clusters are only found in certain positions in the word. For instance, **nw**, **sw**, **hw**, and **yw** never occur at the beginning of a word, and no **Cw** clusters ever occur at the end of a word (compare *atim* with *atimwak*). The second type, the fricative-stop clusters, come in two subtypes, [s]-stop and [h]-stop. These are also very restricted as none of them can ever start a word.

I. Consonant-[w] clusters

- **pW** tāpwē - “truly”
- **tW** itwē - “say it!”
- **kW** kwayask - “correct”
- **CW** icwēwinis - “little word”*
- **mW** mwēstas - “later”
- **nW** ānwēhta - “reject it!”
- **SW** nawaswās - “chase him/her!”
- **hW** wahwā! - “oh my!”
- **yW** miywāsin - “it’s good”**

II. Fricative-Stop clusters

[s]-stop clusters

- **sp** ispimihk - “above”
- **st** astā - “set it there!”
- **sk** iskotēw - “fire”
- **sc** ascascwās - “cottage cheese”

[h]-stop clusters

- **hp** akohp - “blanket”
- **ht** ātiht - “some”
- **hk** askihk - “pail”
- **hc** anohc - “now”

***cw** is a rare cluster, occurring most often as a diminutive of **tw**.
 ****yw** will be **thw** [ðw] in Woods Cree.

One exception to these patterns is the combination of **hý** as in:

- **hy** pihýew - “prairie chicken/spruce grouse” or wāhýaw - “far; far away”

This is rare in Plains Cree and non-existent in other dialects. In Plains Cree, it is usually simplified to just **h** (*pihew*) or **y** (*piyew*). It may survive as “hth” [hð] in Woods Cree, but is usually simplified to just “th” [ð] (e.g. *pihtiw*). In Swampy Cree, it is just “n” (e.g. *pinew*).

3.2.2.2 Three-Consonant Clusters

There are only 8 three-consonant clusters in most dialects of Cree, all beginning with [s] or [h] and all ending in [w]. These only occur in the middle of words, never at the beginning or end.

<u>[s]-stop-[w]</u>	<u>[h]-stop-[w]</u>
- spw <u>ospwākan</u> - “pipe”	- hpw <u>ahpwētikwē</u> - “maybe”
- stw <u>nistwāw</u> - “three times”	- htw <u>tānitahtwāw</u> - “how many times”
- skw <u>iskwēw</u> - “woman”	- hkw <u>ihkwa</u> - “louse”
- scw <u>ascascwās</u> - “cottage cheese”	- hcw <u>mōhcw-āya</u> - “foolish one”

Some areas of Woods Cree would also have “**thkw**” ([θkw] with devoicing of the [ð] (of “**this**”) to the [θ] (of “**thin**”)) as in *mithkwāw* “it is red”, in place of *miskwāw*, but this is not common.

Other than the clusters demonstrated above, no other clusters occur. If you find yourself writing any combination of sounds other than those listed above, you are missing a vowel (usually a short i sound, e.g. *tānisi*, not “tānsi”: **never** “ns”!).

3.3 Stress Patterns

A very important aspect of any language, and one rarely if ever represented in spelling, is the stress or intonation pattern. The Cree stress pattern differs considerably from that of English and can present many problems for the non-speaker, especially since stress is not overtly marked in Cree spelling. However, there are some clues to Cree stress in the SRO, and this makes the SRO all that much more valuable. In the examples that follow, the syllable with primary stress in the Cree word will be underlined, while in the rough English pronunciations given in curled brackets, primary stress is indicated by full capital letters and secondary stress (where shown) is indicated by small caps.

3.3.1 2-Syllable Words

In two-syllable words, the final (or **ultimate**) syllable is typically given the main stress:

<u>Cree</u>	<u>rough English pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
<u>wacask</u>	{wuh TSUSK}	“muskrat”
<u>atim</u>	{uh TIM}	“dog”

If you write a word with only two syllables, but the stress is on the first syllable, chances are the word has been collapsed in spoken Cree and a vowel has been lost from the middle syllable. There are, however, some exceptions, so care must be taken (see immediately below and subsequently in Chapter 4).

3.3.2 3-(or more)-Syllable Words

In words of three or more syllables, the third last (or **antepenultimate**) syllable receives

the main stress, while the final syllable also receives some secondary stress:

<u>mask</u> isin	{MUSS kiss SIN}	“moccasin; shoe”
mask <u>is</u> ina	{muss KISS sin NUH}	“moccasins; shoes”

This is not a common pattern in English, but it does occasionally occur as in the following examples:

<u>med</u> icine	{MED dis sin}
med <u>ic</u> inal	{med DIS sin nul}

However, this pattern won't hold for English if the second last (or penultimate) syllable is heavy or long (i.e. contains a tense or complex vowel or a vowel plus at least one consonant in that same syllable):

<u>am</u> oeba	{uh MEE buh}	(not {UM mee buh})
um <u>br</u> ella	{um BREL luh}	(not {UM brel luh})

In contrast, antepenultimate stress does hold in Cree regardless of the length of the vowel of the penultimate:

<u>aw</u> āsis	{UH waa SIS}	“child”
<u>piy</u> ēsīs	{PEE yay CEASE}	“bird”

This pattern can be particularly difficult for English speakers to adjust to since the long (or tense) vowel in English speech tends to attract stress. However, it is very important when speaking Cree to keep vowel length and stress separate. Pronouncing *piyēsīs* as {pee YAY cease} is just as incorrect in Cree as pronouncing “syllable” as {sil LAB bull} in English.

In Cree words of more than four syllables, the antepenultimate retains the primary stress, but there are also secondary stresses which generally occur every second syllable to the left or right (with secondary stresses in SMALL CAPS):

<u>Cree</u>	<u>rough pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
sēwēpicikan	{SAY way PIT tsig GUN}	“phone”
ātayōhkēwina	{aa TIE yoh KAY win NUH}	“legends”
kiskinwahamātowikamik	{KISS kin WUH hum MAA toe WICK kum MICK}	“school”

The placement of stress can have several effects on the pronunciation of syllables and words. Perhaps the most common effect in Cree is the complete loss or deletion of unstressed short vowels and, thus, the syllable to which they belong. This is also a process which should be quite familiar to speakers and spellers of English. For instance, the word “laboratory”, despite being spelled as if it had five syllables (as it originally did), is commonly pronounced with only four (e.g. {LAB bret TOR ree} in North America, or {lub BOR ret TREE} in Britain). In this case, one consistent spelling helps unite the word for all English dialects despite pronunciation differences. Some SRO spellings accomplish this same purpose by ignoring certain features of surface pronunciation. In Cree, vowel or syllable loss occurs most commonly when the unstressed vowel is a short “i” [ɪ], but this vowel is retained in spelling, even when it is rarely, if ever, pronounced:

<u>Cree SRO</u>	<u>rough pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
<u>tā</u> nisi	{TAAN si}	“how; hello, how are you?”
<u>tā</u> nitē	{TAAN tay}	“where”

The SRO spelling of these examples often strikes fluent speakers as odd because of the presence

of the “silent-i” after the “n”. However, there are some very sound reasons for including the “i” vowel in the spelling. For instance, we can find evidence for the presence of the vowel in the way the words in question have been formed. These particular examples, *tānisi* and *tānitē*, are made up of an initial question or interrogative particle /*tān-*/ (which never occurs alone) plus the particles *isi* (indicating manner, i.e. “so, thus”) and *itē* (indicating location, i.e. “there; where”). These latter two particles can occur alone, but never without the initial vowel [ɪ]. Thus, the derivations of these two words are as follows:

tān- “?”	+ isi “so, thus, in such a manner”	=	tānisi	“in what manner; how”
tān- “?”	+ itē “there, in such a place”	=	tānitē	“in what place; where”

Hence, we have evidence based on the word structure for the inclusion of the “silent-i”. More importantly for our discussion here, though, is the stress pattern indicated in these examples. In the rough pronunciations, there appear to be only two syllables in each, but the stress does not fall on the final syllable, as predicted by our earlier rule. This suggests the stressed syllable is really the antepenultimate (or third last), at least in origin, and that the unstressed syllable has simply been deleted. Thus, the SRO spelling helps to indicate the origin of these words as three-syllable words, both explaining and indicating the proper stress pattern. If, in contrast, these words were really just two syllable words, spelled without the “silent-i”, we might expect the following stress patterns and pronunciations:

<u>mispelled Cree</u>	<u>rough pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
“tānsi”	{taan SI}	“??”
“tāntē”	{taan TAY}	“??”

Pronouncing these words in this way in isolation is simply incorrect and, thus, no sensible translation can be given. Taken together, the evidence from both **phonology** (the sound system; in this case, stress) and **morphology** (word formation) argue very strongly for the SRO spelling, despite the predictable feature of vowel loss in the spoken language. This “silent-i” rule in Cree spelling is very similar to the “silent-e” in English: both sounds are unpronounced in their respective languages, but they both give an important clue to the pronunciation of the word.

3.4 Conclusion

Spelling need not represent just sounds. It can represent the beauty of a language’s entire structure. And that is why the Standard Roman Orthography is one of the best spelling systems in use for any language throughout the world today. It has been designed specifically for the Cree language. It is not a system which requires validation from the practices of English spelling, or the idiosyncracies of any other orthography. It is a very consistent system which has innumerable benefits. Its consistency goes beyond that cited in this chapter.

Many times, the spelling may be in doubt because of dialect or regional differences or simply the difference in rapidity of speech. We can more easily control for such problem areas when we recognize that a word or morpheme with a single consistent meaning should likewise be spelled consistently whenever it is encountered, regardless of variation in pronunciation. Some of these problem areas will be addressed in the next chapter.

Problem Areas

4.1 Building Words

When writing in English, we are used to thinking of relatively small words, each consisting of a single meaning, occurring and written in isolation from the words surrounding them. The structure of English is such that this works most of the time, but occasionally even English requires the combination of meaningful elements or distinct words into even larger words. This can be accomplished in three ways: 1) simply joining two words or meaningful elements and writing them together as a single word (e.g. “green” and “house” become “greenhouse”; “dog” and *-s* (“plural”) become “dogs”); 2) joining two distinct elements with a hyphen (e.g. “sky-blue”, “co-operate”); 3) indicating the collapse and reduced pronunciation of a combination of elements with an apostrophe (e.g. “I” and “am” become “I’m”; “do” and “not” become “don’t”, etc.). In most of the preceding English examples, the elements that are combined can also stand alone as separate words.

However, it is interesting and important to note that even English contains a number of meaningful elements (or **morphemes**) that cannot stand alone as words (e.g. *-s* “plural”, *co-*, *-’m* (cf. “am”), *-n’t* (cf. “not”)). In contrast to the relatively few “**bound**” morphemes (i.e. meaningful elements that cannot stand alone) that occur in English, many other languages have far more bound morphemes than free ones, and thus must build words by combining these many small meaningful elements. Cree is one language which contains a vast number of bound morphemes and thus, unlike English, the majority of Cree words consist of more than one meaningful element. An example of the difference in word structure between Cree and English can be found in the next two sentences in which the same basic meanings are expressed, but in a very different number of words:

- (1a) *nikī-wī-nitawi-kiyokawānānak nitāniskocāpānisinānak kihci-kiskinwahamātowikamikohk.*
 (1b) We were going to go visit our great-great-grandchildren at the University.

What is said here in 11 words in English⁵ requires only three words in Cree, but what big words! It is, in fact, possible to break the three large Cree words down into their smaller meaningful elements (just as it is possible to divide “great-great-grandchildren” into five elements in English), but what is important here is that, in each Cree word, many meaningful elements are joined together and written as a single complex word. And in both languages, as shown in these examples, the two most important means of writing the combination of morphemes and words are 1) simple combination and 2) hyphenation. Each of these two processes will be discussed in separate sections below, while the use, misuse and lack of use of the apostrophe will also be dealt with.

4.1.1 Simple Combination

As the example above illustrates, Cree is a language which combines a large number of bound meaningful elements (or morphemes) into single words. In many cases, a single word represents an entire English sentence. However, word formation and sentence formation remain two different processes and what we are concerned with here is to show the combination of bound elements (which cannot otherwise occur in isolation) into words (which can). This is important to note, since sentences consist of words written in isolation from one another (i.e. separated by spaces), while words are written as units. Though we will be looking at various meaningful

⁵Or 13, if you wish to count “great” as a separate word in its twice-repeated role in the example.

elements in the construction of Cree words, we must remember that many of the morphemes that we can identify can never occur alone as complete utterances (or as complete words), and that is why we will not write them as separate from other parts of the word/sentence/utterance.

Repeating one of the words of the example above, *nitāniskocāpānisinānak*, we can isolate a large number of meaningful pieces present. In fact, as illustrated immediately below, this single word is made up of six distinct morphemes, only one of which can ever be used as a separate utterance, but this is essentially the same as for the English translation which also consists of 6 elements. The difference is that all but one of the English elements are free and can usually occur in isolation, (with exceptional compounding occurring in this example).

(2a) nitāniskocāpānisinānak
 ni(t)- ānisko- -cāpān- -is -inān -ak
 1 link great-grand-relation diminutive 1p plural

(2b) “our great-great-grandchildren”
 our great- great- grand- child -ren
 1p plural

In the Cree word in (2a), the most important or **root** morpheme is *-cāpān-* “great-grand-relation”. This cannot be broken down into any smaller elements without completely losing its meaning. What requires at least three English words compounded is encapsulated in the single morpheme *-cāpān-* in Cree. Nor are these exactly equivalent in meaning, for *-cāpān-* can refer to either a “great-grandchild” or a “great-grandparent”, while English usually requires a specific choice between these two vocabulary items. Furthermore, *-cāpān-* is usually not used in isolation (except as a form of address, the **vocative** *cāpān!*). In order to say “my great-grandchild” or “my great-grandparent (either great-grandmother or great-grandfather)”, another bound element must be added, the Cree equivalent of “my”, which is the first person (1) marker *ni-*. To show that this cannot occur in isolation, simply answer the question: *awīna anihi ocāpāna?* (“Whose great-grandparent is that?”). You might well be able to answer with *niya* (“mine”) or *niya ana (nicāpān)*⁶ (“s/he’s mine/that’s my *cāpān*”). What you cannot say as an answer to that question is “ni”. *ni-* is not a word by itself in Cree. It is bound and therefore must always be attached directly to the element it is occurring with (see more on personal pronouns in section 4.2.1 below).

Other elements in *nitāniskocāpānisinānak* are similarly bound. The element *-inān* which indicates that the first person plural (1p) is also not free. If you are asked who is going somewhere or to whom does some object belong, you cannot answer “inān” or even “ni- inān”. Instead, the independent (free) pronoun *niyanān* would be required to express “we (exclusively; not you)” or “ours (exclusively; not yours)”. The diminutive *-is* typically indicates that things are smaller than the norm, but you cannot answer a question about the size of an object by saying “is”. The animate plural ending *-ak* indicates that more than one individual is involved, but you cannot answer a question like *pēyak piko cī anima ēkota?* (“Is that just one there?”) by answering, “*namōya, ak!*”. *-ak* is no more a word in Cree than *-s* is in English, and both of these morphemes are written as integral parts of the words they are attached to. And finally, *ānisko-* is an element that indicates a “linkage” or “extension” of something. In this case, it extends the distance of the “great-grand-” relationship one further generation (i.e. an extra “great-”).⁷

All of the bound forms in the example we’ve been discussing are simply written as part of the one large word that they make up, without any breaks or hyphens. If this were true with all

⁶Note, dialectally the form may be *nicāpān* or *nōcāpān*.

⁷Since *ānisko-* begins with a vowel, the first person marker *ni-* appears as *nit-*. This does not change its bound status.

bound morphemes for all Cree words, we would not need to say anything more. However, there are still differences in the free versus bound status of various Cree elements and this affects the way we mark the combination of these elements. Some morphemes are always written as attached directly to other morphemes, without any breaks or hyphens. Person-marking **prefixes** (i.e. elements that come before the root; e.g. *ni(t)-*, *ki(t)-*, *o(t)-*) and **suffixes** (i.e. elements that come after the root; e.g. *-inān*, *-naw*) as well as plural-marking suffixes (e.g. *-ak*, *-a*) are always attached as parts of words and never hyphenated. Bound roots like those representing kinship terms (e.g. *-stēs* “older brother”, *nistēs* “my older brother”) and body parts (e.g. *-cihciy-* “hand”, *kicihciy* “your hand”) are also never hyphenated when written out as full words. In contrast, there are a number of additional elements, known as particles, which are commonly separated from the elements to which they are attached by a hyphen.

4.1.2 Hyphenation

The most commonly hyphenated particles are those which precede verbs (i.e. **preverbs** or “indeclinable preverbs” (IPV)) and nouns (i.e. **prenouns** or “indeclinable pre-nouns” (IPN)). Some examples of preverbs and pre-nouns include:

(3)	IPV:	kakwē-	“try to”	IPN:	misi-	“big”
		nōhtē-	“want to”		apisci-	“small”
		māci-	“start to”		kihci-	“great”
		pōni-	“stop”		kino-	“long”
		maci-	“badly”		maci-	“bad”
		miyo-	“well”		miyo-	“good”

Though such particles may be important to the overall meaning of an utterance, they are, strictly speaking, optional elements, much like the English adverbs and adjectives to which they correspond. In other words, the presence of a preverb or prenoun is not necessary for the word to be complete. The hyphenation thus illustrates that the root or stem to which the particle is added can occur without the particle. A simple example will illustrate this.

(4)	pīkiskwē	“speak!”
	māci-pīkiskwē	“start speaking!”

Here, the stem *pīkiskwē* “speak” can occur on its own (in command form). In order to add the meaning “start to, begin to”, the bound particle *māci-* is added, but this is neither written as a separate word (as it cannot stand alone) nor as an essential part of a single stem.

In contrast, personal prefixes can and are written as units with these particles, without hyphenation, when they co-occur. The nature of personal prefixes as essential bound forms overrides the optional nature of particles. Personal prefixes are always attached directly to whatever element immediately follows, regardless of whether it is a verb stem or particle:

(5)	nipīkiskwān	“I speak”
	nimāci-pīkiskwān	“I start to speak”

This difference is not arbitrarily imposed on Cree SRO spellings. There is an easy test to show that the person prefixes act differently than the preverbs. When a vowel-final preverb is added before a vowel-initial verb stem, the two vowels can be kept separate, or collapsed to a single long vowel in rapid speech:

(6)	ati-atoskēw	“s/he starts working”
	at-ātoskēw	“s/he starts working”

The actual pronunciation does not affect the meaning. If the vowels are not collapsed together, the “hiatus” between the two vowels may commonly be filled by a glide such as [h] or [y], (e.g. [ʌtɪhʌtuske:w]). Both the insertion of a glide or the collapse of vowels are predictable possibilities, often varying by dialect or even personal choice, and need not be incorporated in the actual spelling. In fact, though limited vowel reduction has sometimes been recognized, as above, the hiatus consonant/glide is **not** written. Thus, *ati-atoskēw* would **never** be written “atih-atoskēw”, “ati-hatoskēw”, or “atihatoskēw”. In contrast, though, person prefixes do not work this way. As will be discussed in more detail below (in section 4.2.1), when a person prefix is added to a vowel-initial verb stem, the vowels are neither collapsed nor held separate by a glide. Instead, a [t] connector is used. This holds true whether the person prefix is attached to a verb stem or a particle:

- (7) *niṭatoskān* “I work”
 niṭati-atoskān “I start working”

The [t] connector shows that the boundary between the person prefixes and whatever it attaches to is different than that between preverbs and verb stems. This difference is recognized by the choice of direct attachment rather than hyphenation.

Still, the use of hyphenation for particles is not always so simple. Particles in Cree are commonly formed from root morphemes by the addition of a vowel (-i), but roots can often also be used to construct verb or noun stems, in which case they form integral parts of words and are therefore not hyphenated. A simple example of this can be found in the comparison of the following words:

- (8) a) *māci-pīkiskwēw* “s/he starts speaking”
 b) *māci-atoskēw* or *māc-ātoskēw* “s/he starts working (e.g. for the day)”
 c) *mātatoskēw* “s/he starts work (e.g. at a new job)”

In the first two examples, the common preverb *māci-* is hyphenated to an **inflected** (i.e. person-marked) free verb stem. When the verb stem begins with a consonant, as with *pīkiskwē-* in (8a), this is unproblematic. If the verb stems begins with a vowel, however, as in (8b), the collapse of two vowels (also called “sandhi” (cf. Wolfart 1973, 1996)) might obscure the occurrence of the particle. In many cases, the fact that it is still a particle is recoverable through a couple of phonetic features. For instance, we can tell that the particle *māci-* is still present in *māc-ātoskēw* by the presence of the [c] sound of *māci-*, rather than a [t] sound which would be present in the underived root */māt-/*. The particle is in fact formed by the root */māt-/* plus the particle-forming suffix *-i*. Furthermore, the initial vowel of the stem *atoskē-*, which is normally short, now appears to be long in *māc-ātoskēw*. The lengthening of this vowel has occurred due to the collapse of the particle-final [i] and the stem’s regular short initial vowel [a] (see section 4.1.4 below for more detail). Thus, the pronunciation and spelling of *māc-ātoskēw* still indicate the origin of this as a combination of particle plus verb stem. Similarly, the spelling *māci-atoskēw* shows this formation explicitly without indication of any vowel contraction.

In contrast, the example in (8c), *mātatoskēw*, lacks both of these particle-indicating features. The sound is [t] rather than [c], and the usual short [a] is still present and unlengthened. Both indicate that no particle-forming *-i* suffix has been used. In other words, *mātatoskēw* is formed by the addition of the bound root */māt-/* rather than the particle *māci-*. For this reason, no hyphenation is used and the root is combined, even with another stem, as a single word.

Similar examples can be found for nouns. If a particle is used, it is hyphenated to the noun stem, but if the particle root is used, no hyphenation occurs, and often the noun root to which it is attached takes a special form:

latter, with hyphenation, would seem best, but in this case, mere size might also be taken into consideration. As such, both elements are fairly short and the resulting word is not any larger than an average Cree word. For this reason, many will prefer to leave out the hyphen, and this is in essence the same pattern as we find with many English compounds (cf. *greenhouse* and *cupboard* versus *vice-president*). Ultimately, this is an example which could be written either way, as a unit or hyphenated. If the unhyphenated forms are preferred in cases like this, it is likely due to the fact that such forms occur so commonly that Cree speakers consider them as units and therefore prefer to write them as such. The only thing that cannot be done in such cases is to follow English examples like *fire engine*, and write the two elements separately as if they remain two separate words. In writing Cree, compounding should always be recognized.

Additional examples of the problems associated with deciding whether or not to hyphenate are readily found in the numerous entries including the VTA (and VTI) stem *wēpin-* in the bilingual Cree-English dictionary, *nēhíyawēwin: itwēwina* (Wolvengrey 2001):

- (12) a) wēpin “throw him/her/it (animate) away!”
 b) ati-wēpinēw “s/he goes throwing him/her/it away”
 c) waýawī-wēpinēw “s/he throws him/her/it outside”
 d) ȩkatēwēpinēw “s/he throws him/her/it off to the side”
 or ýȩkatē-wēpinēw
 e) akociwēpinēw “s/he throws him/her/it so as to hang”
 f) acici-wēpinēw “s/he throws him/her/it upside down”

The stem *wēpin-* can clearly stand on its own (as in (12a)) and be combined with regular preverbs such as *ati-* (in (12b)) or other stems like *waýawī-* (in (12c)). However, there is constant fluctuation between the use and non-use of the hyphen, as illustrated by the examples in (12d-f) and no real attempt has yet been made to regularize this. This remains an area which needs clarification and consistent usage (see 4.2 below).

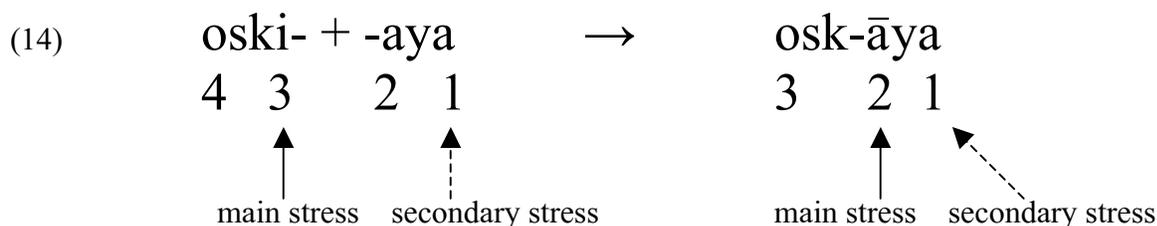
4.1.2.1 Hyphenation and Stress⁸

We have seen with the pair of words, *māc-ātoskēw* and *mātataskēw*, that hyphenation can indicate the morphological origin of a Cree word. One final important way that hyphenation contributes to Cree spelling is by indicating the proper stress pattern of some words, although this is generally limited to instances in which the element following the hyphen consists of only two syllables. Examples include the following:

(13)	<u>Cree SRO</u>	<u>rough pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
a)	osk-āya osk-āyis	{ose SKY ya} {ose SKY yis}	“young one; new things” “youngster”
b)	miýw-āyāw miýwāsin	{mee WHY yow} {MEE waa sin}	“s/he is well” “it is good”
c)	pȩhc-āyihk pȩhcāyihk	{peeh TSIE yeehk} {PEEH tsie yeehk}	“inside” “inside”
d)	nȩhc-āyihk nȩhcāyihk	{neeh TSIE yeehk} {NEEH tsie yeehk}	“down, below” “down, below”

⁸Much of the discussion in this section is modified from Wolvengrey (2001:xxvi-xxvii).

The examples under (13a), *osk-āya* and *osk-āyis*, are both formed by adding the particle *oski* “new, young” to the root /*ay-*/ “one; person, creature” (itself found in many other words, such as *kēhtē-aya* “elder”). In *osk-āya*, the final vowel is a marker for number (either the archaic animate singular or the inanimate plural) which is required in order to meet the minimum word requirement of two syllables. In *osk-āyis*, the second syllable following the hyphen is provided by the diminutive suffix *-is*. In both cases, “sandhi” has occurred collapsing the last syllable of *oski* with the initial vowel of /*ay-*/ (see section 4.1.4 below for further detail). Similarly, in both examples, the hyphen marks this boundary as well as indicating the stress pattern. This can be illustrated by showing the derivation of one of our examples, *osk-āya*, where the numbers indicate the syllable as counted from the right to the left of the word (i.e. from the end back towards the beginning):



Each of these elements separately would, in Cree, be expected to receive stress on the final syllable (i.e. on 1 and 3). When uttered together, the third-last or **antepenultimate** syllable takes the main or primary stress, and there remains a secondary stress on the final vowel (see also section 3.3 above). However, when the third and second last vowels (i, a) collapse to *ā*, the second and third syllables also collapse, reducing the word to three syllables, but now with the stress apparently on the second-last or **penultimate** syllable. This is not as we might expect for a Cree word, but the hyphen tells us that we have a collapsed form, allowing us to predict that the stress does not occur on the new antepenultimate. In actual fact, the vowels have merged to share certain features, as have the syllables. While the vowel typically retains the quality of the second-last or following vowel (e.g. a → *ā*, not i → *ī*),⁹ it also retains the stress of the third last or antepenultimate vowel. Without the hyphen, the word appears to be a normal three-syllable word, but this suggests that the word has the following incorrect pronunciation:

(15) <u>Cree SRO</u>	<u>rough pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
*oskāya	{OSE sky ya}	“??”

This is incorrect (as indicated by the asterisk (*)), since the spelling does not indicate the important word-formation process and sound contraction that cause an apparently aberrant stress pattern. Instead, the hyphen must be included and serves the very important function in the Cree SRO of indicating the correct stress pattern. Another example of this type is *kēhtē-aya* “elder”. Regardless of how this might be pronounced, either essentially as spelled ([*ke:hté:ayā*]) or with a hiatus glide inserted ([*ke:hté:yayā*]) or with collapse ([*ke:hté:yā*]), the stress stays with the long vowel *ē*.

The next set of examples, repeated here as (16), illustrates the importance of the hyphen in terms of a contrast between very similar forms.

(16)	<u>Cree SRO</u>	<u>rough pronunciation</u>	<u>translation</u>
a)	miýw-āyāw	{mee WHY yow}	“s/he is well”
b)	miýwāsin	{MEE waa sin}	“it is good”

⁹Note, however, that if the third last vowel is long, as in *kēhtē-aya*, the long vowel proves the stronger if and when contraction occurs. For more detail, see section 4.1.4 below.

Both *miýw-āyāw* and *miýwāsin* contain the root /*miýw-*/ “good, well”. In *miýwāsin*, in (16b), the verb root is modified by the two verbal suffixes /-ā/ “VII classifier” and /-sin/ “diminutive” in the creation of a three-syllable stem. As such, it has normal antepenultimate stress and no hyphen is used. In contrast, (16a) *miýw-āyāw* consists of the verb stem *ayā-* “to be” compounded with the particle *miýo*, with sandhi accounting for the collapse of the two vowels and subsequent shift of stress from the original [o] to the new lengthened vowel ā. If this were merely a normal three-syllable word, as with *miýwāsin*, we would expect a quite different stress pattern:

(17) **miýwāyāw* {MEE why yow} “??”

However, this is incorrect.¹⁰ The necessary hyphen in *miýw-āyāw*, indicating sandhi, again gives valuable information about the stress pattern.

The final two sets of examples from (13), repeated here as (18) and (19), illustrate how variation can occur across the dialects or even among speakers of a single community. The variant spellings given for the next two words indicate variant stress patterns. Where stress appears to be on the second last syllable, as in the (a) forms, the hyphen provides us with this information. Where stress appears on the third last syllable, as in the (b) examples, no hyphen is necessary.

(18)	a)	p̄ihc-āyihk	{peeh TSIE yeehk}	“inside”
	b)	p̄ihcāyihk	{PEEH tsie yeehk}	“inside”
(19)	a)	n̄ihc-āyihk	{neeh TSIE yeehk}	“down, below”
	b)	n̄ihcāyihk	{NEEH tsie yeehk}	“down, below”

Both pronunciations of these words have been attested. The correct spelling of the word in any given area will be the one that best represents the stress pattern in use. If the stress appears to be on the penultimate syllable (i.e. second last: ā), then a hyphen is needed. If, on the other hand, the main stress falls on the antepenultimate (i.e. third last: ī), then no hyphen is necessary as the word has been re-analyzed as a three-syllable word in such dialects. Thus, the alphabetic SRO can give extensive information on both the phonological (e.g. phonemes and stress patterns) and morphological (e.g. word-formation boundaries) make-up of a Cree word.

In instances of sandhi (vowel coalescence), it is becoming standard practice to allow both possible SRO spellings, much as we can alternate “do not” with “don’t” in English. Very often it is the reduced or collapsed form which is preferable to fluent speakers, but it is important to retain the hyphen in spelling for the vital information it imparts (see also section 4.1.4 below).

4.1.3 Why Apostrophe sounds like Catastrophe

The occurrence of sandhi in Cree is similar though not identical to the process of contraction well-known and recognized in English spelling rules. Given this similarity, the natural question will be whether or not to use the apostrophe in Cree spelling as it is used in English. The simple answer for now is: NO! The more detailed answer, justifying the simple answer, runs as follows:

In English, certain very common contractions are recognized and the apostrophe is used to mark these. Most of them involve personal pronouns and auxiliary verbs like “be”, “have” and “do”, or these same verbs with the negative “not”. But when do we use these contractions? For instance, when in the current text are contractions found? Again the simple answer (ignoring

¹⁰Note that if the stress pattern has shifted, as it apparently has in at least some areas of Woods Cree, so that the stress pattern illustrated here in (17) is correct (i.e. {MITH why yow}), then the spelling without the hyphen (e.g. *mithwāyāw*), becomes appropriate. The point being made here applies to the Plains Cree pronunciation.

those contractions cited merely as examples of contractions) is: Never! This text is written in formal English. As such, contractions are not used. Everything is written out fully. This does not mean every syllable is necessarily meant to be fully enunciated in the event the text is read aloud. We speak as we speak and we write as we write and these two very different means of communication are not meant to be exactly equivalent. As we have seen elsewhere, attempting to make our writing system as close as possible to the exact sounds of speech may highlight dialectal difference, but this can and will also obscure the communicative use of the writing system across dialects. In this way, a standard writing system promotes clarity of communication and understanding. Thus, for the use of any notation to be a standard part of a standard writing system, it must be used in, dare we say it again, a **standard** way.

With this in mind, the important thing to remember about the English use of apostrophes is that there is, in fact, a standard. When we use the apostrophe, we all know what the uncontracted form is and we can all use the uncontracted form if we wish. If you inadvertently write “don’t” in a formal report and discover this upon proofreading and need to change it, you will not need to struggle to figure out that the uncontracted form is “do not”. Both the contracted and uncontracted forms are learned side-by-side when learning the English writing system. As writers of English, we all learn what the acceptable contractions are, and there are in fact very few. Many other contractions, just as common in English speech, are never recognized in written form. For instance, we can easily understand the following written question:

(20) Did you eat yet? [dɪd juw iyt yet]

But how many of us actually enunciate this as four perfectly realized syllables with pauses between each word? In actual fact, there is a whole range of possible contraction that is used by fluent speakers, almost none of which is ever recognized in English writing. There are no commonly acceptable contractions for “did you”, though “didya” or “didja” have been used to capture one level of contraction. Even more impossible is finding any standard way to reduce “you eat” or “eat yet”. Contractions of these words are simply not allowed in written English. And this is despite the fact that, in the proper context, most of us would easily understand this sentence, even when it is reduced to a mere two syllables without any pause:

(21) d’j’eachet? [ʃiɹɔt] {JEET chet}

What all this means is that very few contractions are actually found in English, and those which are used are well known to writers of the language. Another important thing to note about English contractions is that a wide variety of sounds are unpredictably lost in the various examples of contraction that we do have:

(22)	I am	→	I’m	delete [æ].
	you are	→	you’re	delete [a], often changing [u] to [ʊ] or [o].
	(s)he is	→	(s)he’s	delete [ɪ].
	we will	→	we’ll	delete [wɪ].
	I had	→	I’d	delete [hæ].
	they would	→	they’d	delete [wʊ].
	are not	→	aren’t	delete [ɑ].
	do not	→	don’t	delete [ɑ], changing [u] to [o].
	will not	→	won’t	delete [ɑ], changing [ɪl] to [o].
	etc.			

The apostrophe marks the spot where the contraction occurs, but the actual effect of the contraction may be quite different from word to word. This is, in part, why we recognize so few examples of contraction in English, but also shows that it is only the contractions which are both common and very unpredictable which tend to find their way into the standard system. Let us now try and transfer this English practice to the Cree writing system. What we will need are some very common yet unpredictable contractions in Cree. Any suggestions? ...

Well, perhaps you cannot think of any. And why should you, since before we can recognize common contractions we also have to know exactly what the contracted form is contracted from. This implies that before we start writing things in contracted form, we better know the full, uncontracted form first. And at this stage in the standardization of the Cree writing system, we are still learning, attempting to teach, and promoting the most uncomplicated and cross-dialectally applicable system possible. Complicating it with rules of contraction is not a good idea, and will only increase the number of things the Cree speller needs to learn. Thus, we return to the simple answer to whether or not to use apostrophes: *namōya wīhkāc!*

For the sake of further argument, however, let's return to our search for common and/or unpredictable contractions in Cree. First of all, it will be very easy to find common contractions. The unstressed short vowel *i* [ɪ] is very commonly dropped in rapid or ordinary Cree speech. However, the very fact that we can state that this vowel is lost when “unstressed” illustrates the quite predictable nature of this contraction.¹¹ If we choose to use an apostrophe every time a short *i* is lost, there will be a vast number of apostrophes taking the place of the simple vowel “i”. For instance:

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| (23) | <i>tānisi</i> | ≠ | <i>tān'si</i> |
| | <i>tānitē</i> | ≠ | <i>tān'tē</i> |
| | <i>nisitohtam</i> | ≠ | <i>n's'tohtam</i> |
| | <i>ninisisohtēn</i> | ≠ | <i>n'n's'tohtēn</i> |

We might begin with words like *tānisi* or *tānitē* where a single apostrophe may appear innocuous enough, but where exactly will it end? Ultimately, we may have as many if not more apostrophes in words than the symbol “i” itself. At what point do we simply abandon the symbol “i” and use the apostrophe in its place? The fact is that most words containing instances of the short vowel *i* will have this vowel pronounced or dropped, often by the same speaker at different times or in different moods, let alone by speakers of different dialects. So whose pronunciation do we use to decide what the “best” reduced spelling should be? Did your uncle David pronounce it better at 3:23 p.m. last Thursday than he did three hours and twelve minutes earlier, and was this better than how my auntie Ruth said it on the preceding Friday? And is the pattern of contraction exhibited in Plains Cree spoken at White Bear preferable to that at Beardy's or Sweetgrass, or are any of these Plains Cree areas more suitable as a standard than Woods Cree as spoken at La Ronge or Swampy Cree spoken at Cumberland? No, and neither do we really need to decide if we should use one of the following seven possible spellings:

- (24) *n'n's'tohtēn*
nin's'tohtēn
n'nis'tohtēn
n'n'sitohtēn
ninisis'tohtēn
nin'sitohtēn
n'nisisohtēn

¹¹The actual conditions for the loss of “i” are more complex, including its position between homorganic consonants (e.g. *s* and *t*), and it may even be lost when stressed given the proximity of various other vocalic sounds (e.g. *n*, *m*).

Of course, our discussion is phrased in such a way to allow everyone to decide that arguing over such possibilities is clearly foolish. If the spelling system is to work and achieve the goal of allowing for consistent communication across large areas, then one single spelling had better be chosen and used consistently, even if it does not exactly match any single pronunciation by any single Cree speaker of any particular dialect at any time. Apostrophes may well have their use some day, especially when trying to capture the exact nuances of a particular dialect. However, before they can be used effectively, the form of the word being reduced must be recognized and known. At this point in the process of standardizing written Cree, we are not yet at that stage. Thus, for now, we have yet another very simple rule when writing Cree:

never use an apostrophe!

4.1.4 Another Form of Contraction

Having done away with the English-type marking of contractions, we must still address the process of “sandhi”. Because this process, so prevalent in Cree, is absent from English, there is no standard way of marking this which can be borrowed. This is a good thing, since we need not worry about the misapplication of another English-based standard, such as the use of capitals and apostrophes. Instead, we can simply find an appropriate means of marking this wholly Cree phenomenon, or choose to ignore it completely.

The process of sandhi refers to a contraction of vowels across word or word formation boundaries. This means that when two words or parts of words occur next to each other, placing two vowels adjacent to one another, these two vowels may, under certain conditions, contract together. This is very common in Cree speech. So, for instance, when the following two words are uttered together, the two adjacent short vowels are often pronounced as if they were one single long vowel.

(25)	ana ana	“that is the one”	/ʌnʌ ʌnʌ/	
		→	[ʌnā : nʌ]	an āna

Note that these two words spoken together in a phrase act very much like a single word for the rules of Cree stress assignment. Specifically, the third last or antepenultimate syllable takes the main stress, but when the two short vowels collapse together to form one long vowel, the stress appears to occur on the second last or penultimate syllable. This, as we saw above in section 3.3, is because the stress comes from the antepenultimate syllable, but in this case the antepenultimate and penultimate syllables have merged due to sandhi. As the first spelling, *ana ana*, suggests, the way to represent this in the SRO is to avoid recognizing the contraction altogether and write the words out in full, just as we have argued elsewhere. However, as sandhi is so prevalent in Cree, the result is hard to ignore, and a means of recognizing it in the written form has been introduced. As can be seen by the second possibility (*an āna*), this involves dropping the first of the two vowels (i.e. the vowel at the end of the first element), and writing the second vowel (i.e. the initial vowel of the second element) as long. Note, though, that the words are still written as separate words, and not collapsed to a single word. This is, in fact, the same process already discussed above in section 4.1.2.1 where the boundary in question was marked by hyphenation. Some of the examples discussed at that time can be repeated here:

(26)	oski-aya	→	osk-āya	“young one”
	nīhci-ayihk	→	nīhc-āyihk	“downstairs”
	miyo-ayāw	→	miyw-āyāw	“s/he is well”
	nitati-atoskān	→	nitat-ātoskān	“I begin working”

When the sandhi boundary is within a word, it is more common to use this spelling option, and some, such as *mi'yw-āyāw*, may even become the preferred spelling. Across word boundaries, however, both options are possible, and the collapsed form tends only to be used to emphasize the exact spoken nature of a text. This implies that in standard writing, it is likely best to write the words out in full without the contraction. Nevertheless, we can cite these further examples of sandhi across word boundaries:

(27)	niya anima	→	niy ānima	“that is mine”
	ēkosi ani	→	ēkos āni	“that is it”
	piko awiyak	→	pikw āwiyak	“anyone; everyone”
	awa iskwēw	→	aw īskwēw	“this woman”
	ōki iskwēwak	→	ōk īskwēwak	“these women”
	piko ispīhk	→	pikw īspīhk	“any time”
	ōma o'yākan	→	ōm o'yākan	“this dish”
	ōki oski-ayak	→	ōk o'sk-āyak	“these young ones”
	ēwako ocēk	→	ēwak o'cēk	“that fisher (mammal)”

From these examples, we can see the typical pattern of contraction. The sounds involved and the results of each contraction can be listed as follows, with \emptyset standing for the simple deletion of the first sound and its symbol:

(28)	a + a	→	\emptyset ā
	i + a	→	\emptyset ā
	o + a	→	w ā
	a + i	→	\emptyset ī ¹²
	i + i	→	\emptyset ī
	o + i	→	w ī
	a + o	→	\emptyset ō
	i + o	→	\emptyset ō
	o + o	→	\emptyset ō

It is important to note that if the first vowel is an **o** [ʊ] and the second is not, the vowels can be collapsed, but a **w** [w] remains in the place of the **o**. When two short **o** sounds come together, the result is simply a long **ō**. The reason for the [w] is that the feature of lip rounding, inherent to both **w** and **o**, is not lost during sandhi. Thus, the short **o** vowel may be subsumed in the process of sandhi, but the feature of lip rounding must remain and, hence, [w] remains. Having said this, however, we must also note that not all speakers or dialects will exhibit contraction of these vowels

¹²Note that when the vowels **a + i** come together across a hyphen boundary, the result is commonly **ē** rather than **ī**. For instance, *ta-ispayik* is commonly collapsed to *t-ēspayik*. This can also result from the combination of **ā + i**. See further discussion below.

in precisely this way. Thus, using such shortcuts may actually limit the applicability of any material prepared using sandhi-based spellings. This provides the main argument against implementing these particular spelling rules: the less complex the rules, the simpler the learner's task.

The rules involving long vowels are even more complex, and will not be discussed in detail at this time. Even those introduced so far may seem too complex and for good reason: they are. Thus, when learning the SRO it is undoubtedly best not to worry at first about the possibilities of sandhi representation. The spelling system works fine without it and remains more flexible, covering more possible dialects. The rules of sandhi representation may allow for a more accurate picture of an individual's speech, but this is neither necessary nor desirable in most written documents. When all forms of vowel contraction and deletion are ignored, the spelling system is simpler, much more widely applicable, and fully capable of being used for a wider variety of purposes, from introductory readers in Kindergarten to official records in Legislature. And whether educating our future leaders or recording governmental procedure among our current leaders, the important key will be to be as consistent as possible, facilitated by the easiest possible system.

4.2 Consistency

One of the greatest problems in using any writing system is maintaining consistency, but this is easily overcome when abundant resource materials are available, as with the uncountable number of English dictionaries currently in print. Fortunately, when writing in English, we do not need to reinvent our spelling, based on our own imprecise and incomplete knowledge of a set of rules, every time we attempt to write anything. If we are not sure, we simply look it up. Unfortunately, we do not as yet have the same level of resource material for Cree, and so many who try to write in Cree have had to fall back on attempts to apply some rules, whether based on English or the most basic SRO principles (e.g. "one sound-one symbol"). This does not always yield the best results. However, as more and more SRO Cree materials become available (see Chapter 8 for a bibliography of some currently available resources), this problem will be removed for Cree as well, and it will become a simple matter to look up any word we may be unsure of. Though it will take time to approach the level of English resource availability, some good Cree spelling resources can already be found and these hold not only explicit material, but also implicit clues to figuring out spellings for words that may not be listed in the exact form we wish to use. Many times, it is simply a matter of recognizing a consistent meaning, and then making sure the spelling of the **morpheme** (i.e. simple meaningful element such as a word, root or affix) representing that meaning stays consistent. This section introduces several important categories in the grammar of Cree, with illustrations and explanations of their proper SRO representations.

4.2.1 Person Markers

In English, the categories of person marking are represented by independent words or pronouns. This means that words like "I", "me", "you", "your", "theirs", etc. are written separately from other words and are treated as words by themselves. Only in informal writing do we attach (some of) these pronouns to other words (e.g. "I'm", "you're", "she's", "he'll", "they'd", etc.).¹³ In contrast, most forms of Cree personal pronouns are not free words. With the exception of the independent pronouns in Cree, all other pronominal forms are **bound**, meaning that they cannot stand alone but instead must attach to other words. Bound person markers can be found attached at the beginning of words (i.e. as **prefixes**), or at the end of words (i.e. as **suffixes**).

¹³When this occurs, the apostrophe (') is used in English spelling to indicate that a contraction has occurred. As discussed above, the apostrophe is not used in writing Cree nor are any collapsed forms of the person markers recognized in the SRO.

4.2.1.1 Prefixes

There are only three basic person-marking prefixes in Cree and these are based on the singular independent pronouns:

- (29) 1s **ni**ya “I, me, mine”
 2s **ki**ya “you, yours”
 3s **wi**ya “s/he, him/her, his/hers”

First person (1) forms include the [n] of the first person pronoun and can have three variant shapes: *n-*, *ni-*, *nit-*. Second person (2) forms include the [k] of the second person pronoun and can have three variant forms: *k-*, *ki-*, *kit-*. Third person (3) forms incorporate the [w] of the third person pronouns and take the following three variants: *w-*, *o-*, *ot-*. Thus, each of the three person-marking prefixes can occur in three variant forms: a single consonant (**C-**), a consonant plus /ɪ/ (**Ci-**), a consonant plus /ɪ/ plus [t] (**Cit-**).¹⁴ Note that the combination of /wɪ/ yields [o] in the third person forms. The choice of the actual form of the prefix depends on the shape of the word it is being added to. If the person prefix is added to a **dependent** noun stem (i.e. one that cannot occur alone as a word) which begins with a vowel, then the simplest **C-** forms of the prefixes are used:

- (30) prefix + stem = inflected word
n- + -ahkwan- *NDI* “heel” = **nahkwan** “my heel”
k- + -īcimos- *NDA* “sweetheart” = **kīcimos** “your sweetheart”
w- + -ēstakay- *NDI* “hair” = **wēstakaya** “his/her hair”

The common **Ci-** forms are used if the prefix is added to any element (dependent or independent noun, or verb) which begins with a consonant:¹⁵

- (31) prefix + stem = inflected word
ni- + -spiton- *NDI* “arm” = **nispiton** “my arm”
ki- + nipā- *VAI* “sleep” = **kinipān** “you sleep”
o- + maskisin- *NI* “shoe” = **omaskisin** “his/her shoe”

The **Cit-** forms are used if the prefix is being added to any vowel-initial independent noun, or verb:

- (32) prefix + stem = inflected word
nit- + api- *VAI* “sit” = **nitapin** “I sit”
kit- + asam- *VTA* “feed s.o.” = **kitasamāw** “you feed him/her”
ot- + astotin- *NI* “hat” = **otastotin** “his/her hat”

Essentially, when the prefix has to be added to a vowel-initial stem, a [t] is added between the two vowels (i.e. the /ɪ/ of the prefix and the initial vowel of the stem). Vowel-initial dependent nouns are exempt from this as they take the **C-** forms of the prefixes discussed above.

An extremely important point about the person-marking prefixes as illustrated in the preceding examples is that they are never hyphenated. When these prefixes are written in isolation,

¹⁴A fourth prefix, *mi-*, can also occur and it marks an unspecified possessor (neither first, second, nor third person) or the absence of a possessor on dependent nouns. The same three variant form (i.e. *m-*, *mi-*, *mit-*) have been attested for this prefix, but it will not be discussed further here.

¹⁵The third person prefix form is not commonly used in verbal inflection. Only some rather complex verb forms take *o-/ot-* prefixes and these will not be illustrated here.

a hyphen is used to show that they are bound forms which cannot stand on their own. Similarly, hyphens are used to show the status of dependent nouns, verbs stems, etc. This does not mean that the hyphen should or must be written when stems and prefixes are combined (refer also to section 4.1.2 above). Nor does it matter if these prefixes are being added to nouns, as in (33):

- (33) **naniway** “my cheek” (cf. *maniway* “cheek”; -aniway- *NDI*)
nimaskisin “my shoe” (cf. maskisin- “shoe, moccasin” *NI*)
nitastotin “my hat” (cf. astotin- “hat” *NI*)

or to verbs or particles as in (34):¹⁶

- (34) **mōya nōh-wāpamāw** “I haven’t seen him/her” (cf. *ōh-* “perfect aspect” *IPV*)
niwāpamāw “I see him/her” (cf. *wāpam-* “see s.o.” *VTA*)
nitasamāw “I feed him/her” (cf. *asam-* “feed s.o.” *VTA*)

The reasons for not hyphenating person prefixes are tied together with the occurrence of the [**t**] in the **Cit-** pronoun forms. As discussed above in section 4.1.2, hyphens are used for several purposes in writing Cree, but we see here that the person prefixes are never hyphenated. If we compare the way certain elements combine into words, we can see that there is a difference between the person markers and other preverbal or prenominal forms. As we saw earlier, when a vowel-final preverb or prenoun is attached to a vowel-initial stem, two things are possible: either the two vowels are kept separate at the boundary (as in (35a)) or the two vowels collapse to a single long vowel (as in (35b)):

- (35) particle + stem = inflected word
a) **pōni-** *IPV* “stop” **atoskē-** *VAI* “work” **pōni-atoskēw**
“s/he stops working”
b) **pōni-** *IPV* “stop” **atoskē-** *VAI* “work” **pōn-ātoskēw**
“s/he stops working”

In both forms, whether sandhi (or contraction) has occurred, a hyphen is used in the SRO to indicate that a certain type of word-formation boundary is present. In contrast, when the person-marking prefixes are added, something very different occurs. The prefix and stem vowels do not generally collapse, but neither can they simply be kept separate from one another without the aid of some kind of connector. The [**t**] serves this purpose and thus takes the place of the hyphen:

- (36) prefix + particle + stem = inflected word
nit- **atoskāt-** *VTI* “work on s.t.” **nitatoskātēn**
“I work at it”
nit- **ati-** *IPV* “progressively” **atoskāt-** *VTI* “work on s.t.” **nitati-atoskātēn**
nitat-ātoskātēn
“I work on it along the way”

For this reason, the use of a hyphen between the person prefixes and the immediately following element is incorrect. To do so suggests that the boundary is similar to that which occurs between preverbs and verbs, or prenouns and nouns, and this is similarly incorrect. Thus, we have a simple rule for writing person-marking prefixes as part of the word to which they are attached: **never use hyphens when attaching person-marking prefixes!**

¹⁶The **C-** forms of the person prefixes are not common with verbs or particles.

4.2.1.2 Suffixes

The number of person-marking suffixes far exceeds the prefixes, but they are similar in that they are added directly to the end of noun or verb stems and are never hyphenated. The greatest problem encountered when writing the person-marking suffixes is consistency. It is extremely important to spell the various suffixes in a consistent manner because often the smallest differences, errors or omissions can lead to miscommunication. Though space does not permit the discussion of all possible person-marking suffixes,¹⁷ some of the more common and problematical will be exemplified here.

4.2.1.2.1 Some VAI Suffixes

Perhaps the most problematical endings can be exemplified by the person-marking suffixes of the VAI Conjunct mode paradigms. The following chart gives the basic paradigm, and this is followed by the discussion of two important points.

VAI Conjunct Mode Conjugation

Person	Conjunct prefix	VAI stem	Person suffix	Inflected form	English translation
1s	ē-	nipā-	-yān	ē-nipāyān	“(as) I sleep”
2s			-yan	ē-nipāyan	“(as) you sleep”
1p			-yāhk	ē-nipāyāhk	“(as) we (excl) sleep”
21p			-yahk	ē-nipāyahk	“(as) we (incl) sleep”
2p			-yēk	ē-nipāyēk	“(as) you (pl) sleep”
3s			-t	ē-nipāt	“(as) s/he sleeps”
3p			-cik	ē-nipācik	“(as) they sleep”
3’			-yit	ē-nipāyit	“(as) another sleeps”

The most obvious point to be discussed has to do with the fact that two pairs of the person-marking suffixes in this chart each differ by a single sound (as indicated by the presence or absence of the macron). Specifically, there is only a very slight difference between first (1s) and second (2s) person singular forms, and the exact same slight difference between the first person plural exclusive (1p) and the first person plural inclusive (21p) forms. This difference is the alternation of a long versus a short vowel, as follows:

- (37) long vowel: 1s -yān “I” 1p -yāhk “we (but not you)”
short vowel: 2s -yan “you” 21p -yahk “we (including you)”

Since this is the only difference between the forms of each pair, it is extremely important to write these forms correctly. If, for instance, the macron is omitted, the word will be read incorrectly. Thus, if you wish to say that “I worked hard”, but you write it as follows:

- (38) ē-kī-sōhkatoskēyan = “(as) you worked hard”

the result will mislead the reader. The form intended, ē-kī-sōhkatoskēyān (“(as) I worked hard”), will not be properly understood due to the spelling error. The second pair of forms in (37) exhibit the same long versus short vowel difference, but also include the problematical **Vhk** sequence. Given that this can be a very subtle difference at best, the spelling is essential in indicating the important difference between inclusive (-yahk) and exclusive (-yāhk) first person plural meaning.

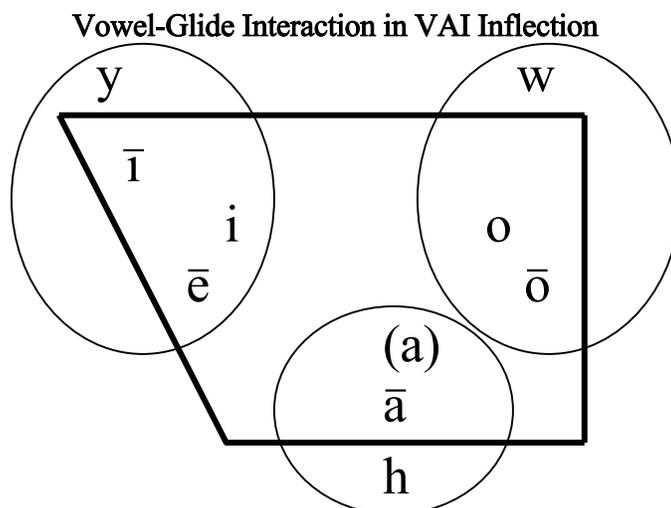
¹⁷More detailed information can be found in such teaching texts as Ahenakew (1987) and Okimāsis (2004).

A further complication is introduced to all of the “y”-initial VAI suffixes in that not all dialects pronounce it as [y] consistently. In many areas, the “y” frequently becomes a [w], and in others even [h] sometimes appears. Some examples include:

- (39) a) ē-apīyān [e:ʌpiːya:n]
 ē-tapasīyān [e:tʌpʌsiːya:n]
 ē-mētawēyān [e:me:tʌweːya:n]
- b) ē-nīkamoyān [e:nīkʌmoːya:n] ~ [e:nīkʌmoːwa:n]
 ē-pasīkōyān [e:pʌsīkoːya:n] ~ [e:pʌsīkoːwa:n]
- c) ē-pīmīpāhtāyān [e:pīmīpʌhtaːya:n] ~ [e:pīmīpʌhtaːha:n]

These examples have been purposefully arranged into three different sets, since we can predict precisely when the “y” of the VAI suffixes is likely to surface as a [w] or even an [h]. For all the verbs in (39), and in fact all VAI verbs, the [y] pronunciation will remain consistent throughout in certain dialects. Furthermore, verbs of the type given in (39a) will remain consistent with [y] in all dialects, exhibiting no fluctuation. Though verbs of the type given in (39b) can retain the [y], it is becoming more and more common to find the [y] replaced by [w]. It must be noted, however, that the only time [w] appears is after verbs ending in short o or long ō. Essentially, the lip rounding used to produce the [o] and [o:] sounds affects the following glide, producing a rounded glide, and that can only be [w]. Thus, the appearance of [w] is completely predictable. A similar process is involved in those few areas (primarily in Swampy Cree) in which [h] is replacing [y]. The example in (39c) stands for VAI stems that end in long ā. In such instances, an [h]-like sound replaces the glide since, in producing the [a:] sound, the tongue is far from the roof of the mouth, where both the glides [y] and [w] are produced. Instead of moving the tongue from low in the mouth up high and back again as would be needed for instance with the sequence [a:ya:], [y] is sometimes replaced by [h], which requires no tongue movement. Again, this occurs as a predictable simplification in pronunciation, only when following the [a:] sound and only in a minority of dialect areas.

The predictable nature of these changes to the pronunciation of the glide can be illustrated in the following chart. Here, the six Cree vowels which can end VAI stems are shown in relation to the tongue position needed to produce them. All can be followed by [y], but only the “back” and “rounded” vowels, o and ō, can be followed by [w], and only ā is ever followed by [h].¹⁸



¹⁸VAI stems never end in short a.

moreso than sound. These endings may sound very similar and many may have difficulty telling them apart altogether, especially in dialects where the [h] is fading or gone. In such cases it is the meaning which one must pay attention to. In extreme cases, of course, such as complete homonyms in English where two or more words sound exactly the same, spelling can be a useful tool in keeping these very different meanings straight. For instance, if we wish you to bear with us through this explanation, we had probably best not write “bare with us”! And if you wish to write the English word [raɪt], which [raɪt] do you write, “right”, “rite” or “write”? If you are writing about the rights of individuals to practice their own cultural rites, you had better write it the right way, right? And that is all that is expected from anyone who wishes to spell correctly in any writing system: learn it and use it consistently. We all do that for English. We can all do that for Cree.

4.2.2 h

Probably the one aspect of Cree spelling that Cree speakers and learners find the most difficult to be consistent with is the use of “h”. And if you try to spell based solely on what you hear or think you hear, then this will be very difficult indeed, since the “h” is so variable across not only the major Cree dialects, but from region to region and community to community within those major dialect areas. Some of this variability has been hinted at above. As stated in section 3.2.1.1, it can be difficult to tell the difference between long and short vowels which occur before an hC sequence. In some areas, the [h] is disappearing in these sequences altogether, with the common side effect of having the vowel lengthened. Thus, we might expect a whole range of slightly different pronunciations for a single word, with varying degrees of vowel length and the presence or absence of the [h]:

(43) mahihkan [mahihkʌn] ~ [mahihkʌn] ~ [mahihkʌn] ~ [mahihkʌn]²⁰

How does one tell which spelling to use given the fluctuation of the vowel length and quality and the presence or absence of the [h]? The answer is the same as the answer when you ask how to spell “tomato”. Look it up! Check with the available authoritative resources. Do not try to reinvent the spelling every time it is needed. Perpetuating the state of do-it-yourself spellings for Cree will only delay our progress towards the time when Cree can usefully and widely be used as a written language and when Cree can therefore gain official language status.

Understandably, this will be a less than satisfying answer to some, but ultimately it is the simplest and easiest, for it removes the onus on each writer to figure out how to spell something. And this is particularly important with regard to that problematical [h]. If you are uncertain, the chances are that it has already been done and a quick check of the available resources will save much time in editing later.²¹

4.2.2.1 h in Suffixes

Many very common elements in Cree require the consistent use of “h” in spelling and some have already been cited above, including suffixes like VAI 1p *-yāhk* and 21p *-yahk*, and VTI 1p

²⁰Previously, this word has been spelled *mahihkan* based on comparison with Ojibwa *mahihkan* which shows that the middle vowel was historically long. However, the consensus among Cree speakers appears to be that this vowel, unstressed as it is, is predominantly short and hence the spelling has been modified to reflect this in most recent publications. The single dot (·) or colon (:) in the transcriptions are ways to indicate varying degrees of length of the vowel.

²¹For those words (or morphemes) not yet recorded, there is still a network of professionals on the Cree Language Retention Committees and at *miywāsin ink* who are available to help edit materials. Please see the contact numbers included at the end of the bibliography.

-amāhk, 21p *-amahk*, 3s *-ahk*, and 3p *-ahkik*. Others include the Unspecified Actor Conjunct VTA 3s *-iht* and 3p *-ihcik*. These are especially important in comparison with the VTA 3s-1s *-it* and 3p-1s *-icik* respectively, as illustrated in the following minimal pairs:

- (44) a) \bar{e} -wīcihiht “(as) s/he is helped”
 b) \bar{e} -wīcihit “(as) s/he helps me”
- (45) a) \bar{e} -wīcihihcik “(as) they are helped”
 b) \bar{e} -wīcihicik “(as) they help me”

The (a) examples of both (44) and (45) include the unspecified actor suffixes indicating that a third person (singular in (44) and plural in (45)) is being acted upon without reference to the person(s) acting. In contrast, the (b) examples indicate that the third person is acting on the first person. Thus, yet another important meaning contrast is conveyed by the presence or absence of “h”.

Other unspecified actor suffixes include VTI *-amihk* and VAI *-hk* conjunct forms:

- (46) VTI: \bar{e} -kī-miskamihk “(as) it was found”
 VAI: \bar{e} -kī-nīmihitohk “(as) there was a dance; as there was dancing”

The VAI conjunct unspecified actor suffix *-hk* is now rare except in Plains Cree. In many areas it has been or is being replaced by the conjunct form of *-(nā)niwan*, but this also contains an **h**: *-(nā)niwahk*.

- (47) VAI Independent: nīmihitonāniwan “there is a dance; there is dancing”
 VAI Conjunct: \bar{e} -nīmihitonāniwahk “(as) there is a dance; (as) there is dancing”

The alternation of Independent [n] with Conjunct [h] exhibited here is a very common pattern in VII verbs. Many VII stems end in [n], and the [n] often disappears in the conjunct. However, if the verb ends in *-an*, an [h] occurs before the conjunct *-k* endings:

- (48) VII Independent: māyātan “it is ugly”
 VII Conjunct: \bar{e} -māyātahk “(as) it is ugly”

This is a very important pattern to remember, as it is often difficult to tell the difference between [ah] and [ā] before a consonant. Errors are frequently encountered, for instance, when VII endings like *-nākwān*, *-mākwān*, *-htākwān*, etc. are placed in the Conjunct. Each of these has a long vowel in the first syllable and a short one in the last syllable and this does **not** change when in the conjunct, as illustrated in (49). Thus, the sequence in such verb endings is always CākwahC (i.e. long vowel, then short vowel + h)

- (49) miyōnākwān “it looks good” → \bar{e} -miyōnākwahk “(as) it looks good”
 miyōmākwān “it smells good” → \bar{e} -miyōmākwahk “(as) it smells good”
 miyōhtākwān “it sounds good” → \bar{e} -miyōhtākwahk “(as) it sounds good”

In contrast, (50) gives three common misspellings (indicated by *) which should be avoided.

- (50) * \bar{e} -miyōnākwāk
 * \bar{e} -miyōnahkwāk
 * \bar{e} -miyōnahkwahk

None of these look good at all.

The **h** appearing in the VII Conjunct is far less common when a vowel other than **a** (i.e. **i** or **o**) appears, but occasionally the **h** will be necessary with certain VII stems ending in *-on* as well, and these must simply be learned. For example:

- (51) mispon “it snows” → ē-mispok “as it snows”
 pipon “it is winter” → ē-pipohk “as it is winter”

Finally, a very important suffix attached to nouns rather than verbs is the locative: *-(i)hk*. This suffix undergoes various changes depending on the stems to which it attaches, but the [hk] sequence is always present:

- (52) sākahikan “lake” → sākahikanihk “at/on/in the lake”
 mēskanaw “road” → mēskanāhk “on the road”
 sīpiy “river” → sīpīhk “at/in/on the river”
 mistik “tree” → mistikohk “in the tree”

Thus, if a noun has been marked as a locative, the *-(i)hk* suffix should always be used consistently. This is very important, especially for those dialects in which a final [hk] sequence is being lost altogether. Again, the spelling ensures that the correct meaning is conveyed regardless of actual pronunciation.

4.2.2.2 h in Verb Finals

The [h] sound and/or spelling is not only important in inflectional affixes, but can also be a key part of verb stems. Several important examples of verb finals will be discussed here, beginning with the morpheme, *-h*, consisting solely of the [h] sound. This morpheme often imparts quite clearly the meaning of causation or “make someone do something”, as illustrated in the following examples where VAI stems are converted to VTA stems by the addition of *-h*:

- (53) VAI ācimo! “tell a story” + -h → VTA ācimoh! “have him/her tell a story”
 VAI nikamo! “sing” + -h → VTA nikamoh! “make him/her sing”
 VAI nīmi! “dance” + -h → VTA nīmih! “make him/her dance”

It can be difficult to tell the difference between the pairs of command (or Imperative) forms of these verbs, as given in (53), based on sound alone. However, the spelling makes it perfectly clear which is intended. VAI stems never end in [h], while VTA stems always end in a consonant, and many end simply in *-h*. The **h** must always be present in spelling.

Another set of VTA stems which end in [h] in the Imperative contain another verb final morpheme, *-(a)hw-*, which can be translated as referring to “action performed on an animate object with a tool or instrument” (e.g. using a stick as opposed to the hand, foot, body, etc.). In the Imperative, the morpheme-final and thus word-final [w] is dropped in pronunciation and spelling, though it resurfaces when other inflections are added. Some examples of these verbs are:

- (54) pakamah! “hit him/her” pakamahwew “s/he hits him/her”
 ýahkah! “push him/her” ýahkahwew “s/he pushes him/her”
 sāmah! “touch him/her” sāmahwew “s/he touches him/her”
 wēpah! “sweep him/her/it away” wēpahwew “s/he sweeps him/her away”

Again, VTA stems must end in a consonant, so [h] is always present even when [w] has been omitted. Such VTA stems are generally matched by VTI stems which end in *-(a)h* “action performed on an inanimate object with a tool or instrument”. The examples in (55) show the contrast of VTA stems with their VTI counterparts which require the VTI Imperative ending *-a*.

- (55) VTA pakamah! “hit him/her” VTI pakamaha! “hit it/them”
 ýahkah! “push him/her” ýahkaha! “push it/them”
 wēpah! “sweep him/her/it away” wēpaha! “sweep it/them away”

Much more could be said about the idiosyncracies of these verbs stems, but this information can be found in more detailed grammatical descriptions of Cree (e.g. Ahenakew 1987; Okimāsis 2004; Wolfart 1973).

One additional morpheme containing [h] which is both very common and very important is the complex VTI final *-ēyih̄t-*. This morpheme, and its VTA counterpart *-ēȳim-*, refer to the thought process or emotions, such that the meaning of a verb can suggest the proper spelling:

- (56) kiskēyih̄tam “s/he knows (it)”
 itēyih̄tam “s/he thinks thus”
 māmitonēyih̄tam “s/he thinks about it”
 kaskēyih̄tam “s/he is sad (over it); s/he misses it (emotionally)”
 pīkwēyih̄tam “s/he worries over it”

This element is also found in VAI and VII derivatives, such as the following:

- (57) VAI kiskēyih̄takosiw “s/he is known, s/he is famous”
 kistēyih̄takosiw “s/he is respected, s/he is highly thought of”
- (58) VII kiskēyih̄takwan “it is known; it is renowned”
 miȳwēyih̄cikātēw “it is well thought of”²²

It is very important that this complex element be spelled in full whenever it occurs. This can be particularly difficult for Plains Cree speakers since the [e:yɪht] sequence often collapses to [e:ht] or even [e:t], especially when the main stress falls on ē. It is also a problem in Swampy Cree, where *-ēñih̄t-* [e:nɪht] is often collapsed to [e:nt]. It tends to be less of a problem in Woods Cree, where “th” [ð] corresponds to Plains ȳ and Swampy ñ and does not allow the same type of sound contraction:

- (59) kiskīthih̄tam “s/he knows (it)”
 itīthih̄tam “s/he thinks thus”
 māmitonīthih̄tam “s/he thinks about it”, etc.

Occasionally, however, there are apparent exceptions to this spelling rule. For instance, the example in (60) might appear, based on its meaning, to include *-ēyih̄t-*. However, the stress pattern (see section 3.1.2 above) in this word indicates instead the spelling given in (60a), and cross-dialectal comparison with Woods Cree (60b) and Swampy Cree (60c) shows that this is correct.

- (60) a) tāpwēhtam “s/he believes it” [tá:pwe:htam]
 b) tāpwīhtam [tá:pwi:htam]
 c) tāpwēhtam [tá:pwe:tam]
 d) not *tāpwēyih̄tam *[ta:pwé:htam]

If *-ēyih̄t-* had been present in this word, we would expect the Plains Cree stress pattern to be as in (60d), which it is not, while the Woods and Swampy Cree forms would contain [ð] and [n] respectively, which they do not. This is another example of the stress pattern helping to determine the appropriate spelling. If at this point you feel that the number of rules to be applied in Cree spelling is starting to mount behind control, please content yourself with the following thoughts: 1) it is still nowhere near the number required for English; 2) these rules have already been applied to the spelling of Cree words and need not be re-applied by every speaker - simply look up the word and write it consistently secure in the knowledge that every spelling is justified.

²²Note that the [t] of *-ēyih̄t-* becomes [c] when followed by i-initial suffixes, such as *-ikātē-*.

4.2.2.3 h in Verb Roots

Most of the problematic spellings involving **h** discussed above involve **hC** clusters, and these sequences, as indicated in section 3.2.1.1 above, are difficult wherever they are encountered. As we have already mentioned the role of **h** in verbal suffixes and verb finals, the last elements that we will discuss containing **h** are verb roots, or simply roots which can be used verbally or otherwise. Certain morphemes contain [h] and these should be spelled consistently whenever they are found. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but it gives a general idea of the importance of maintaining a consistent spelling, especially when compared (cf.) with morphemes that do not contain [h]:

(61) <u>Verb-Initial Morphemes</u> ²³	<u>Example Verb Stems</u>
āhk- “pain; bitterness” (cf. ākw- “conceal/cover”)	<i>āhkosi-</i> “be sick”; <i>āhkwatī-</i> “be frozen” <i>ākō-</i> “conceal s.t.”; <i>ākwh-</i> “conceal s.t.”)
āht- “move; alter”	<i>āhčipici-</i> “move camp”; <i>āhtastā-</i> “set s.t. elsewhere”
cahk- “sharp; prodding”	<i>cahkah-</i> “poke s.o.”; <i>cahkasīnastē-</i> “be spotted”
kēhtē- “old; venerable” (cf. kēt- “remove”)	<i>kēhtē-ayīwi-</i> “be old”; <i>kēhtēnākosi-</i> “look old” <i>kēcikō-</i> “take s.t. off”; <i>kētayīwinisē-</i> “undress”)
kihc- “great”	<i>kihcēyim-</i> “respect s.o.”; <i>kihcītwāwi-</i> “be exalted”
koht- “swallow” (cf. kot- “try”)	<i>kohtcipayīhtā-</i> , <i>kohtāpayīhtā-</i> “swallow s.t.” <i>kocihtā-</i> “try s.t.”; <i>kotahāskwē-</i> “target practice”)
mahk- “large” (cf. mākw- “pressure; oppression”)	<i>mahkastā-</i> “place s.t. in a large pile” <i>mākon-</i> “press s.t.”; <i>mākwēyīmo-</i> “be afraid”
mihkw- “red; blood”	<i>mihkosi-</i> “be red”; <i>mihkwasē-</i> “have measles”
nēhpē(m)- “ready” (cf. nēpē(w)- “shame”)	<i>nēhpēkāpawī-</i> “stand ready”; <i>nēhpēmapī-</i> “sit ready” <i>nēpēm-</i> “shame s.o.”; <i>nēpēwisī-</i> “be shy”)
nihtā- “good; skilled”	<i>nihtāwēyīht-</i> “be resourceful”; <i>nihtāwihtā-</i> “be smart”
nīht- “down, low”	<i>nīhtcipit-</i> “pull s.t. down”; <i>nīhtāsī-</i> “be blown down”
nōhtē- “want, need” (cf. nōt- “hunt; pursue”)	<i>nōhtēsī-</i> “be tired”; <i>nōhtēhkatē-</i> “be hungry” <i>nōcih-</i> “pursue s.o.”; <i>nōtāposwē-</i> “hunt rabbits”)
ohp- “jump; rise”	<i>ohpiki-</i> “grow up”; <i>ohpī-</i> “jump up”
oht- “from”	<i>ohcī-</i> “be from there”; <i>ohtaht-</i> “eat s.t. from there”
pāhk- “dry” (cf. pāk- “swollen”)	<i>pāhkosi-</i> “be dry; dry up”; <i>pāhkwah-</i> “dry s.o.” <i>pākipayī-</i> “swell”; <i>pākisī-</i> “have swollen feet”)
pīht- “in, inside”	<i>pīhtcipit-</i> “pull s.t. inside”; <i>pīhtikwē-</i> “enter”
poht- “into a hole”	<i>pohtcipayī-</i> “fall into a hole”; <i>pohtastā-</i> “insert s.t.”
sēhkē- “of own accord” (cf. sēk- “fright”)	<i>sēhkēpayī-</i> “run automatically” <i>sēkih-</i> “frighten s.o.”; <i>sēkisi-</i> “be scared”)

²³Note that morphemes ending in /t/ frequently have alternate forms with [c], while morphemes ending in a /w/ following a consonant frequently result in stems containing [o] rather than [w]. Both of these changes are generally due to a following [ɪ]; [ɪ] palatalizes /t/ to [c] and the merger of [w + ɪ] produces [o].

(61) continued:

<u>Verb-Initial Morphemes</u> ²⁴		<u>Example Verb Stems</u>
sīht-	“tight”	<i>sīhtcihtin-</i> “fit tightly”; <i>sīhtapi-</i> “sit crowded”
sōhk-	“hard; strong”	<i>sōhkan-</i> “be solid”; <i>sōhkākonē-</i> “be hard snow”
tahk-	“cold”	<i>tahkastā-</i> “cool s.t.”; <i>tahkāyā-</i> “be cold weather”
tēht-	“on top”	<i>tēhcupayī-</i> “spring to the top”; <i>tēhtapi-</i> “mount”
wēht-	“easy, simple”	<i>wēhcasin-</i> “be simple”; <i>wēhtakihtē-</i> “be inexpensive”
wīhk-	“sweet; tasty”	<i>wīhkasin-</i> “taste good”; <i>wīhkimākwān-</i> “smell good”
yāhk-	“push”	<i>yāhkah-</i> “push s.t.”; <i>yāhkikin-</i> “push forth in growth”
yāhk-	“light in weight”	<i>yāhkasin-</i> “be light”; <i>yāhkisīho-</i> “dress lightly”

As is the case with all spelling systems, once these (and other) elements are memorized and spelled consistently, spelling ceases to be a mystifying and frustrating experience.

4.3 Nouns

Most of what has been said in the preceding sections has been focussed on verbs, though most if not all Cree spelling conventions apply equally well to nouns. For instance, many derived nouns also contain such elements as *-ēyīht-*, and again the spelling of this important element must remain consistent:

(62)	kiskēyīhtamowin	“knowledge”
	māmitonēyīhcikan	“mind; thought”
	kāhkwēyīhtamowin	“jealousy”

Though little else will be said specifically about nouns in this book, there is one important spelling rule that helps distinguish some nouns from verb stems. There happen to be very few singular nouns in Cree which end in a vowel, and among those few nouns, only the short vowels are found in final position:²⁵

(63)	a:	kōna	“snow”
	i:	wāwi	“egg”
	o:	mihko	“blood”

Nouns never end in long vowels, though there are some nouns which sound as if they do. If, however, a noun sounds as if it ends in a long $\bar{\text{I}}$ sound, it will be spelled “iy”, and if a nouns sounds as if it ends in a long $\bar{\text{o}}$ sound, it will be spelled “ow”. The reasons for this have more to do with the plural forms than the singular. By including the glide (**y** or **w**) as part of the singular spelling, these nouns can be treated just like all other nouns with regular plural endings. For animate nouns, the plural suffix is *-ak*, while the inanimate form is *-a*. Even more importantly, the “iy” and “ow” spellings group such nouns with all other noun stems which end in a combination of vowel plus glide. This is beneficial since they act in exactly the same way with respect to changes that take place when suffixes like the **diminutive** *-is(is)* or **locative** *-ihk* are added. The similarities are

²⁴Note that morphemes ending in /t/ frequently have alternate forms with [c], while morphemes ending in a /w/ following a consonant frequently result in stems containing [o] rather than [w]. Both of these changes are generally due to a following [ɪ]; [ɪ] palatalizes /t/ to [c] and the merger of [w + ɪ] produces [o].

²⁵Nouns of this type belong to a special class of single-syllable noun stems which are grammatically peculiar in more ways than one. For more detail, consult an appropriate grammatical description of Cree nouns.

demonstrated in the following examples:

(64) **Animate Nouns:**

<u>singular</u>		<u>plural</u>		<u>diminutive</u>	
mahihkan	“wolf”	mahihkanak	“wolves”	mahihkan <i>isis</i>	“wolf cub”
nēhiyaw	“Cree”	nēhiyawak	“Creeps”	nēhiyā <i>sis</i>	“Cree child”
asiniy	“stone”	asiniyak	“stones”	asinī <i>sis</i>	“pebble”
ōhow	“owl”	ōhowak	“owls”	ōhō <i>sis</i>	“owlet”

In (64), all four animate nouns, as spelled in the SRO, need only add the regular animate plural ending *-ak*. If, on the other hand, *asiniy* and *ōhow* were to be spelled “asinī” and “ōhō” respectively, we would need to recognize two special classes of nouns which require the plural forms *-yak* and *-wak*. Fortunately, this is unnecessary. Part of the reason for this can be found in the pattern shown by the diminutive suffix, which takes the form *-isis* when added to regular nouns like *mahihkan*. As illustrated by the other three examples, the addition of the diminutive involves a contraction when added to all stems ending in a vowel-glide sequence. Thus, when the diminutive suffix is added to a noun like *nēhiyaw*, the final sequence of vowel-glide+i (in this case, **aw+i** or [Δwɪ]) collapses to a long vowel (in this case ā [a:]). In the same way, the sequence of “iy” at the end of *asiniy* collapses to a long ī, and the sequence “ow” at the end of *ōhow* collapses to a long ō. In each case, the vowel before the glide becomes long and the glide is dropped. Thus, these nouns act exactly like other vowel-glide noun stems, and the SRO spelling reflects this.

Similarly, inanimate nouns show the same type of patterns, where the regular plural ending is *-a* and the diminutive *-is* undergoes the same contraction with vowel-glide stems.

(65) **Inanimate Nouns:**

<u>singular</u>		<u>plural</u>		<u>diminutive</u>	
masinahikan	“book”	masinahikana	“books”	masinahikan <i>is</i>	“booklet”
mēskanaw	“road”	mēskanawa	“roads”	mēskanā <i>s</i>	“path”
sīpiy	“river”	sīpiya	“rivers”	sīpī <i>s</i>	“stream”
waskow	“cloud”	waskowa	“clouds”	waskō <i>s</i>	“small cloud”

Again, when we avoid spelling *sīpiy* as “sīpī” and *waskow* as “waskō”, we also avoid creating special classes of nouns which add *-ya* and *-wa* respectively to pluralize. With the SRO spelling as given, all of these inanimate nouns merely add the regular plural *-a*. Note also that this spelling convention even has the benefit of setting some nouns and verbs apart. As a noun, the sequence of sounds [sɪ:pɪ:] is spelled *sīpiy* and means “river”, but the same sequence of sounds can also represent a verb meaning “stretch”, in which case it is spelled *sīpī*.

(66)	<u>Noun</u>		<u>Verb</u>
	sīpiy	“river”	sīpī
			“stretch”

Thus, two of the rare homonyms found in Cree are distinguished by spelling rules.

4.3.1 i before y

The “iy” spelling in nouns of this type also has a much wider importance and application. As mentioned in section 3.2.1.3, it is virtually impossible to tell the difference between short **i** and long **ī** when they occur before **y**. To avoid arbitrary choices, the general spelling convention of writing a “short **i** before **y**” when inside a morpheme has been introduced. Because **y** (or rather, **ý**) is an important source of dialect differentiation in Cree, this convention does introduce some discrepancy in the spelling of certain words across the dialects. In Plains Cree, for instance, there

are a far higher number of instances in which *i* and/or *ī* could occur before *y*. The spelling rule of “*i* before *y*” results in these examples, with dialect comparison:

(67)		<u>Plains Cree</u>	<u>Woods Cree</u>	<u>Swampy Cree</u>
	“I, me”	niya	nītha	nīna
	“good”	miyo	mitho	mino
	“s/he gives it to him/her”	miyēw	mīthīw	mīnēw
	“bird”	piyēsīs	pithīsīs	pinēsīs

From these and many more examples, we can see that the vowel preceding Plains Cree *y* is consistently the short *i*, whereas the other dialects sometimes have *ī*. This is because these vowels are more easily differentiated in Woods Cree and Swampy Cree, where the vowel comes before [δ] and [n] respectively and not [y] at all. Rather than expecting Plains Cree speakers to learn which vowels are long and which short in dialects other than their own, the “*i* before *y*” rule simplifies the choice. Making the opposite choice, *ī* instead of *i*, would not create any greater cross-dialectal accuracy. Furthermore, it is not just spellers of Plains Cree who benefit from this simplifying rule. Many instances of “*i*”, long or short, appear before [y] in Woods Cree as well. Only some of these come from instances of *ēy* in the other dialects, as shown in (68):

(68)		<u>Plains Cree</u>	<u>Woods Cree</u>	<u>Swampy Cree</u>
	“one”	pēyak	piyak	pēyak
	“gull”	kiyāsk	kiyāsk	kiyāsk
	“still”	kēyāpic	kiyāpic	kēyāpic
	“never mind”	kiyām	kiyām	kiyām

In Woods Cree, *ī* corresponds with (southern) Plains and Swampy Cree *ē*. Thus, words like *pēyak* and *kēyāpic* should become “*pīyak*” and “*kīyāpic*” in Woods Cree, while *kiyāsk* and *kiyām* would keep their short vowel. However, this would require that speakers of Woods Cree know which vowel the other dialects have in order to determine the proper spelling. We do not require that of Plains Cree speakers, nor do we require it of Woods Cree or Swampy Cree speakers. Again, this rule simplifies the system and what must be learned. Finally, words like *kiyāsk* and *kiyām*, which do not change across the dialects, can be spelled uniformly by adhering to the “*i* before *y*” rule, ensuring that these words are not spelled “...iy...” in some areas and “...īy...” in others.

The only exception to this rule, as already described in section 3.2.1.3 above, applies in all dialects and it is very important. The “*i* before *y*” rule applies only in instances when it cannot be determined by dialect-internal means exactly what the length of the vowel ought to be. This means that, if it is possible to isolate the vowel from the following [y] sound, it should then be possible to determine what the vowel length actually is and spell it accordingly. What this entails for spellers of Cree is that it is possible and even necessary to write a long *ī* before *y* in certain instances: when the vowel is part of a verb stem before the [y]-initial suffixes of the VAI Conjunct mode. These suffixes, cited in section 4.2.1.2.1, are separable from the preceding vowel-final stem and thus the vowel can be found unaffected by the [y]. If in doubt about the length of the vowel of a certain verb, test the verb in different forms in which the [y] does not follow it. The following examples are repeated from 3.2.1.3 above:

(69)	<i>ē</i> -apiyān	“as I’m sitting”	nitapīn	“I sit”	apīk!	“sit!”
	<i>ē</i> -tapasīyān	“as I’m fleeing”	nitapasīn	“I flee”	tapasīk!	“flee!”

In the first column, the vowel length is indeterminate when occurring before [y] (as part of the first person singular suffix *-yān*). However, additional examples show that the verb stem *api* has a short vowel while *tapasī* has a long vowel. Since we can determine this without knowledge of another dialect, we can spell these verb stems consistently regardless of whether or not a [y] follows the

vowel. Thus, we have an exception to the “i before y” rule, but a systematic and justified exception.

4.4 Conclusion

It cannot be emphasized enough just how important consistency in spelling is. It may seem that quite a few rules have been introduced to the SRO, adding to the burden of learning to properly use this spelling system. However, each and every one of the conventions comes from very important patterns rooted in the structure of the Cree language. Furthermore, there are still a relatively small number of rules when compared with English or French spelling, and the rules that are applied, tend to be applied far more consistently, with far fewer exceptions or none whatsoever. It might seem strange then, that so many people devote so much time to learning the English and French spelling systems, as complex as they are. The reasons for this are simple, though, as these writing systems are extremely useful communication tools. But this certainly does not mean we must abandon as futile all efforts to write other languages. We need only pay the same amount of respect to another writing system and the language it represents, to learn it and use it consistently, for it to become an extremely useful tool of communication. This was the purpose for which the SRO was designed, based on the beauty of the structure of the Cree language. It not only has the potential to help Cree speakers in the battle to retain their language, but also to establish Cree as an official language. All it takes is respect.

kistēyih̄tētān kinēhiyāwēwininaw!

āhkami-nēhiyāwētān!

māci-nēhiyāwasinahikētān!

Let's Have Some Fun

Never do we see the drastic differences between the sounds and writing systems of two languages more than when speakers of one language try to spell names and words from a second language according to the sounds and spelling rules of the first. This is very much in evidence in much of Canada where English and/or French speakers and writers have attempted to fit Cree or other First Nations names and words to the practices of these European languages. The results vary greatly from reasonably accurate to downright ridiculous. And the errors come in a number of different forms, mirroring our discussion of the important features of a language's entire sound system as outlined in Chapter 3 above. Furthermore, once someone has written a name down, a reasonably accurate pronunciation does not always accompany it. In the end people often have to guess at the pronunciation that the spelling was intended to represent, and the result is that further errors are created. We'd like to share a few examples of Cree names and common words which have found their way onto the English map of Saskatchewan, highlighting the differences between the English (or French) attempts to record Cree and the appropriate Cree SRO spellings, as well as the numerous shifts of sound and stress pattern that have accompanied the English appropriation of these Cree words.²⁶

5.1 Changed Sounds

The differences between Cree and English sounds have led to some very different English pronunciations of Cree words and names of people and places. The following are just an example of the ways in which spelling can be misinterpreted. In each case, the Cree name as used in English is given on the left hand side with an approximation of the English pronunciation, in curled {} brackets, given beneath. On the right hand side is the original Cree word, written in SRO, also with an approximation (for English speakers) of how it should be pronounced, along with a translation. It is in the comparison of these two pronunciation guides that we see the differences. Discussion will follow each example.

<u>English</u>	<u>Cree</u>
Manitou Beach	manitow
{MAN-nit-too}	{MUN-(ni)-toe}
	“spirit; Creator”

“Manitou” is one of the most commonly borrowed Algonquian words on our map. Notice, however, that the use of “a” has led English speakers to use the same vowel as in “man”, which is incorrect for the Cree pronunciation. Also, the French “ou” spelling at the end has suggested an English “oo” as in “too” despite the fact that most Cree pronunciations are closer to the “o” in “toe”. The Cree pronunciation also differs in that the short, unstressed “i” is usually lost, reducing the Cree word to two syllables, whereas the spelling alone has led the English to retain all three syllables. Three errors in three syllables. *Mon Dieu!*

²⁶ Much of the discussion of this chapter is based on Okimāsis 2002. Additional information on Cree place names can be gleaned from Barry 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2005.

Meskanaw
{MESS-kun-nah}

mēskanaw
{MACE-kuh-now}
“a road/trail”

Meskanaw and Trill are two places named in honour of a single man, *mēskanaw* being his Cree nickname as a translation of his English name. The English spelling is remarkably close to the SRO, but this has not helped to retain the proper pronunciation. Instead, the first syllable has become a “mess”, while the last now rhymes with “law”, rather than “now”. It seems that the closer the English spelling comes to depicting Cree accurately, the further off the trail the pronunciation gets.

Nekaneet
{NEE-guh-neet}

kā-nīkānīt
{kaa-NEE-kaa-neet}
“one who leads, leader; foremost”

The Nekaneet Reserve is named for Chief (*kā-nīkānīt*). The pronunciation has not strayed too far, but in retaining the first syllable stress, the second syllable has, as with unstressed vowels in English, lost its distinctiveness and length. In Cree, even when unstressed, a long vowel stays long.

Notukeu
{NAH-tuh-cue}

nōtokēw
{NO-to-kayoo}
“old woman”

Another place named after the real leaders, Notokeu comes from *nōtokēw* or “old woman”. The fact that this name has also been used as the name for a senior **men’s** hockey league shows that most people in southern Saskatchewan have “not a clue” about its meaning or its pronunciation.

Waskesiu
{WAA-skiss-sue}

wāwāskīsiw
{waa-WAAS-skee-sue}
“elk/red deer”

The popular resort town in Prince Albert National Park has taken its name from the Woods Cree name for “elk”. In addition to the simplification of dropping the first syllable altogether, the vowel of the second-last syllable has again been shortened due to lack of stress.

Witchekan Lake
{WIT-chi-gun}

wīhcīkan(-sākahikan)
{WEEH-chee-kun}
“it stinks” (“lake”)

At Witchekan Lake, the spelling isn’t too bad, with the exception of the French-influenced “ch” combination. However, with the loss of the long vowel in both the first and second syllables, it’s the pronunciation that stinks.

5.2 Changed Stress

As some of the previous examples have shown, stress is very important. Even when the main stress is retained, as in Nekaneet, Waskesiu and Witchekan, the lack of stress can cause

English speakers to alter important sounds. Even more drastic, though, are the changes which occur when the stress is placed on the wrong syllable altogether. The following are examples where the sounds have been kept fairly faithful, but stress has been misplaced. You will likely note that, with a fair amount of consistency, the Cree words or names should be stressed on the third last syllable, while English pronunciations have consistently shifted the stress to the second last syllable. This clearly illustrates the difference between the stress patterns of these two languages.

<u>English</u>	<u>Cree</u>
Missinipe	misi-nipiy
{miss-si-NIP-pee}	{mis-SIN-ni-pee}
	“big water”

The Cree settlement (and broadcasting corporation) on the shores of the Churchill River is known by one of the names for the River itself, “big water”. But whether the English spelling and translation suggested Mississippi (cf. Cree *misi-sīpiy* {miss-SIS-see-pee} “big river”) or whether English stress patterns have warped the Cree name, hearing {miss-si-NIP-pee} always makes us cringe.

Mistawasis	mistawāsis
{miss-tuh-WAA-sis}	{miss-TUH-waa-sis}
	“big child”

Another Chief’s name, *mistawāsis*, has undergone a rather minor and fairly natural change. In Cree, the stress is on the third-last syllable, which is short, while the second-last syllable has a long vowel. Unlike some of the earlier examples though, the English pronunciation has not shortened the unstressed vowel. Instead, the stress has been shifted to the long vowel, leaving the short vowel in the third-last syllable to lose its stress. One must wonder if *mistawāsis* would find the English pronunciation of his name distressing?

Meewasin	miýwāsin
{me-WAA-sin}	{MEE-waa-sin}
	“it is good/nice.”

Finally, a name well-known now because of the Meewasin Valley in Saskatoon. It is true the valley is “nice”, but not so the mispronunciation of the Cree name. Here, both of the syllables in question (the first and second) sound long in Cree, so it is clearly the English preference for stress on the second last syllable (when long) which has guided the common, though not Cree, pronunciation. *namōya miýwāsin*.

5.3 Changed Sounds and Stress

Given the difference that a sound change or a change in stress placement can make to the pronunciation of a name, it stands to reason that changing both will cause even more disruption. This is clearly evident in the following examples where both sound and stress have been altered.

<u>English</u>	<u>Cree</u>
Kenosee Lake	kinosēw
{ken-NO-see}	{KIN-no-sayoo}
	“fish”

The Cree word *kinosēw* “fish” occurs in a number of place names under a number of different spellings. Few are as altered as the pronunciation at Kenosee Lake near the White Bear First Nation. Apparently, the word has proven as slippery to English speakers as the life-form it is meant to represent.

Tatagwa {tuh-TIE-gwuh}	tahtahkwāw {TUHT-tuh-kwow} “It is flat, bald, plain (land).”
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It is not surprising to find a place name in Saskatchewan with the meaning of “Tatagwa”, though the current pronunciation might surprise the Cree speaker who first translated the word for the English. More surprising still would be to discover which of the following Cree precursors really lead to the English use of “Tagaske”.

Tagaske {tuh-GAS-skee}	tahtahkwaskiy {tuht-TUH-kwus-skee} “flat/bald/plain land.”
	or takahkaskiy {tuh-KUHK-kus-skee} “nice land.”
	or tahkaskiy {TUH-kus-skee} “cold land/country.”

If the first of the three possibilities is correct, “Tagaske” and “Tatagwa” are almost the same. In contrast, the second, *takahkaskiy* is just as likely and matches a suggested translation for “Tagaske”. On the other hand, “Tagaske” is the only Saskatchewan-based name to be used for a feature on the surface of the planet Mars. As such, “cold land” would be most appropriate and *tahkaskiy* does seem to match the English form closest. But given the current state of the name, who can really decide whether it originally meant that the land was nice, cold or flat? Those from southern Saskatchewan would agree with all three.

Wiwa Creek {WHY-wuh}	wīwa {wee-WUH} “his wife”
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Another of the names inspired by the story behind Old Wives Lake is found at Wiwa Creek. Why {WHY-wuh}? {wee WUH ndr} that ourselves. Even with only two syllables to choose from there is still a stress error and a related change in sound for that syllable. Now all we need is a German pronunciation to change the Ws to Vs: Viva la difference?

Wascana {waas-CAN-nuh}	oskana {OOS-kuh-nuh} “bones”
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Finally, one of the most commonly found Cree-derived words in Southern Saskatchewan place names is “Wascana”, based on *oskana* “bones”. Just “bones”, that is, because contrary to popular (re: English) belief, this word alone does not mean “pile of bones”. The Cree name of

Regina, *oskana kā-asastēki* “where the bones are piled; pile o’ bones” merely contains *oskana* as one of its constituents and this has been recorded and turned into Wascana in numerous place names in and around the city of Regina. Again, this involves a shift of stress to the second syllable, so that only the bare bones of the original Cree word are still found in the pronunciation of Wascana.

5.4 Conclusion

This survey of the mismatch between English and Cree pronunciation and spelling would not be complete without mention of one of if not the all-time strangest spellings in recorded history. The humorous (or tragic) thing is that this spelling likely arose in an attempt to get as close to the original Cree pronunciation as possible and avoid the possibility that it would be mispronounced by English speakers reading the word. Even so, it is hardly possible to recognize the “lake” in Makwa Sahgaiehcan (*mākwa sākahikan* “loon lake”). Loonie! But isn’t it wonderful that we now have a good Cree spelling system in place and we should now be able to avoid the possibility that such spellings will arise again?

Though it seems that the closer the English spelling is to the Cree SRO, the worse the pronunciation gets (and vice versa), it really should have nothing to do with spelling at all. The key to having these names pronounced correctly lies in the spoken word, not the written word. A final example will illustrate this very well.

Saskatchewan	kisiskāciwan
{suss-CATCH-chi-wun}	{KISS-sis-KAA-tsi-wun}
{suss-CATCH-chi-WAAN}	“It is fast flowing.”

The province of Saskatchewan is named after the Saskatchewan River, itself derived from the Cree word *kisiskāciwan* “it flows quickly; swift current; etc.”. The English version has lost the initial syllable and changed the vowel of the new first syllable, but there is an interesting retention from the Cree pronunciation. Within Saskatchewan itself, the pronunciation of the name (as first given above) retains a final syllable that sounds the same as “won” or “one”. It is only outside Saskatchewan (in Ontario, for instance) where this final syllable is sometimes pronounced as if it were the same as the English word “wan” or the Spanish name “Juan” (as in the second version given above). This is clearly based on the spelling “wan” rather than the intended, original Cree pronunciation. Why then hasn’t this pronunciation taken over in Saskatchewan itself? Simply, English speakers in Saskatchewan have heard it pronounced in a more accurate way ever since it was first borrowed from Cree and have retained a greater semblance of the Cree word than English speakers elsewhere. Spelling actually has little or nothing to do with it and can be overridden by the spoken form. Hearing the spoken form is most important. We now have a good consistent spelling system for Cree, which can go a long way to promoting the use of the Cree language in Saskatchewan and Canada. But ultimately, it is the spoken form which must be heard consistently. If many of the names discussed above had become as common as the name Saskatchewan, their pronunciations would likely have remained closer to the Cree originals. If the Cree language is heard as commonly as English, these pronunciations will not be lost and the spellings will contribute to a vital, living language, not just act as a museum piece recording another lost voice.

māci-nēhiyawasinahikētān!

māka ōma nawac ahpō ta-kī-itōtamahk:

āhkami-nēhiyawētān!

6

Spelling Quizzes

In order to emphasize some of the points made in the preceding chapters and reinforce the use of the SRO, we offer here some sample spelling quizzes which include some commonly misspelled words. The word lists here can also be used as vocabulary lists and thus serve to teach the language, both oral and written.

Quiz 1

minimal pairs

asam	feed him/her!	(VTA ; 2s-3s Imp)	askihk	kettle; pail	(NA)
asām	snowshoe	(NA)	askīhk	on the land	(NI ; loc)
sakahikan	nail	(NI)	kisitēw	it is hot	(VII ; 0 Indp)
sākahikan	lake	(NI)	kīsitēw	it is cooked	(VII ; 0 Indp)
maci-	bad, evil	(IPV)			
māci-	start, begin to	(IPV)	nīki	my home	(NDI ; 1-poss)
mācī	hunt!	(VAI ; 2s Imp)	nikī-	I was ...	
ma cī	is that not so?	(IPH)		(ni- 1s prefix ; kī- IPV ; past tense)	
wīci-	with, accompanying	(IPV ; cf. nikī-wīci-nikamōmāw “I sang with him/her”)			
wīcih	help him/her	(VTA ; cf. nikī-wīcihāw “I helped him/her”)			
ē-wīcihat	(as) you help him	(VTA ; 2s-3s Conj)			
ē-wīcihāt	(as) s/he helps him/her	(VTA ; 3s-3' Conj)			
wīcihāw	s/he is helped	(VTA ; X-3s Indp)	tāniwā	where is s/he?	(PR anim)
wīcihēw	s/he helps him/her	(VTA ; 3s-3' Indp)	tāniwē	where is it?	(PR inan)
ōsi	boat	(NI)			
osīh	make, prepare s.o.	(VTA 2s-3s Imp)			
nitomisin	I have an older sister	(VAI ; 1s Indp ; cf. omisiw)			
nitōmisin	I am greasy	(VAI ; 1s Indp ; cf. tōmisiw)			
mihkwasakay	red skin	(NA)			
mihkwasākay	red coat	(NI)			
pišiw	lynx	(NA)			
pēšiw	bring him/her!”	(VTA 2s-3s Imp)			

Quiz 2

h

āha	yes	(<i>IPC</i>) [also: ēha; cf. Woods Cree: ȩhȩ; Swampy Cree: ēhē]	
ōhi	these	(<i>PR inan</i>)	
anihi	those	(<i>PR inan</i>)	ahi place him/her (<i>VTA</i> ; 2-3 <i>Imp</i>)
nēhi	those yonder	(<i>PR inan</i>)	ahāw o.k., alright; ready
āhāsiw	crow	(<i>NA</i>)	
mahihkan	wolf	(<i>NA</i>)	
mihko	blood	(<i>NI</i>)	
sihko	spit	(<i>NI</i> (and <i>VAI</i> ; 2 <i>Imp</i>))	
pihko	ashes	(<i>NI</i>)	
piko	only, just	(<i>IPC</i>)	
ē-wīcihit	(as) s/he helps me	(<i>VTA</i> ; 3s-1s <i>Conj</i> ; -it)	
ē-wīcihiht	(as) s/he is helped	(<i>VTA</i> ; X-3s <i>Conj</i> ; -iht)	
ē-nitonawak	(as) I look for him/her	(<i>VTA</i> ; 1s-3s <i>Conj</i> ; -ak)	
ē-nitonahk	(as) s/he looks for it	(<i>VTI</i> ; 3s-0 <i>Conj</i> ; -ahk)	
ē-nitonamāhk	(as) we (excl) look for it	(<i>VTI</i> ; 1p-0 <i>Conj</i> ; -amāhk)	
ē-nitonamahk	(as) we (incl) see it	(<i>VTI</i> ; 21p-0 <i>Conj</i> ; -amahk)	
ē-nitonamihk	(as) it is looked for	(<i>VTI</i> ; X-0 <i>Conj</i> ; -amihk)	
ē-ayāyān	(as) I have it	[NOT: ē-hayāyān or ēh-ayāyān or ēhayāyān]	
kēhtē-aya	Elder	[NOT: kēhtēhaya or kēhtēyaya or kēhtēya]	
ōsi	boat	[NOT: ōsih; never with “h”]	
ōsa	boats	[NOT: ōsiha]	
osīh	make/prepare him/her/it	[NOT: osī; always with “h”]	
osīhik	make/prepare them		
mitēh	heart	[NOT: mitē; always with “h”]	
mitēha	hearts		
otēhimina	strawberries		
nitēh	my heart	[NOT: nitē; always with “h”]	
nitēhināna	our hearts		
nīki	my home	[NOT: nīkih; never with “h”]	
nīkināna	our homes		

Quiz 3
pronouns

niya	I; me; mine	niyanān	we; us; ours (exclusive)
kiya	you; yours	kiyānaw	we; us; ours (inclusive)
wiya	s/he; him/her; his/hers	kiyawāw	you; yours (plural)
nīsta	me, too	wiyawāw	they; them; theirs
kīsta	you, too	nīstanān	us, too (exclusive)
wīsta	him/her, too	kīstanaw	us, too (inclusive)
awa	this (animate)	kīstawāw	you, too
ana	that	wīstawāw	them, too
nāha	that yonder	ōma	this (inanimate)
ōki	these	anima	that
aniki	those	nēma	that yonder
nēki	those yonder	ōhi	these
awīna	who	anihi	those
awīniki	who (plural)	nēhi	those yonder
awīniwa	who (obviative)	kīkwāy	what
awiyak	someone	kīkwāya	what (plural, inanimate)
awiyakak	some persons	kīkwāyak	what (plural, animate)
awiya	some (obviative) person(s)	kīkway	something
		kīkwaya	some things
		kīko	which

tāna	which (animate)	tānima	which (inanimate)		
tān āna	which one	tān ānima	which one		
tān āniki	which of those	tān ānihi	which of those		
ēwako	that one	ēwako	that one		
ēwakonik	those (animate) ones	ēwakoni	those (inanimate) ones		
ēkonik	those (animate) ones	ēkoni	those (inanimate) ones		
tānitowahk	what type, what kind	ēkotowahk	that type, that kind		
tānitowihk	in which place				
tāniwā	where is that (animate) one	tāniwē	where is that (inanimate) one		
tāniwēhkāk	where are those ones	tāniwēhā	where are those ones		
tānita	where	ita	where; there	ēkota	there
tānitē	where	itē	where; there	ēkotē	there
ōta	here	anita	there	nētē	over there
ōtē	over here				
tānisi	how	isi	how, so; towards	ēkosi	thus, in that way
tānispī	when	ispī	when, then	ēkospī	at that time
tānispīhk	when	ispīhk	when, then	ēkospīhk	at that time
tānēhki	why	ayisk	because		

Quiz 4
kinship

nohkom	my grandmother (also nōhkom)	ohkomimāw	grandmother
nimosōm	my grandfather	omosōmimāw	grandfather
nōsisim	my grandchild	ōsisimāw	grandchild
ninīkihikwak	my parents	onīkihikomāw	parent
nikāwiy	my mother	okāwīmāw	mother
nohtāwiy	my father (also nōhtāwiy)	ohtāwīmāw	father
nikāwīs	my aunt; my mother's sister my father's brother's wife; my godmother	okāwīsimāw	aunt; godmother
nohcāwīs	my uncle (also nōhcāwīs); my father's brother; my mother's sister's husband; my godfather	ohcāwīsimāw	uncle; godfather
nisikos	my aunt; my father's sister; my mother's brother's wife; my mother-in-law	osikosimāw	aunt; mother-in-law
nisis	my uncle; my mother's brother; my father's sister's husband; my father-in-law	osisimāw	uncle; father-in-law
nīcisānak	my siblings	wīcisānimāw	sibling
nimis	my older sister	omisimāw	older sister
nistēs	my older brother	ostēsimāw	older brother
nisīm	my younger sibling my younger sister my younger brother	osīmimāw	younger sibling younger sister younger brother
nisīmis	my younger sibling my younger sister my younger brother	osīmisimāw	younger sibling younger sister younger brother

niciwāmiskwēm	my cousin; [female speaker only]: my father’s sister’s daughter; my mother’s brother’s daughter	ociwāmiskwēw	cousin (see niciwāmiskwēm)
niciwām	my cousin; [male speaker only]: my father’s sister’s son; my mother’s brother’s son	ociwāmimāw	cousin (see niciwām)
nicāhkos	my cousin; [female speaker only]: my father’s sister’s daughter; my mother’s brother’s daughter, my sister-in-law	ocāhkosimāw	cousin; sister-in-law
nīstāw	my cousin; [male speaker only]: my father’s sister’s son; my mother’s brother’s son	wīstāwimāw	cousin; brother-in-law
nītim	my cousin; [in reference to opposite gender only]; [male speaker]: my father’s sister’s daughter; my mother’s brother’s daughter; [female speaker]: my father’s sister’s son; my mother’s brother’s son	wītimomāw	cousin (see nītim)
nīcimos	my sweetheart; my lover [male speaker]: my girlfriend; my lover [female speaker]: my boyfriend; my lover	wīcimosimāw	sweetheart; lover
niwīkimākan	my spouse	wīkimākan	spouse
nināpēm	my husband	nāpēw	man
nitiskwēm	my wife	iskwēw	woman
nicawāsimisak	my children	awāsis	child
nitānis	my daughter; [male speaker:] my daughter; my brother’s daughter [female speaker:] my daughter; my sister’s daughter	otānisimāw	daughter; (parallel) niece
nikosis	my son [male speaker:] my son; my brother’s son [female speaker:] my son; my sister’s son	okosisimāw	son (parallel) nephew

nitōsimiskwēm	my niece [male speaker:] my brother's daughter [female speaker:] my sister's daughter	otōsimiskwēw	(parallel) niece
nitōsim	my nephew [male speaker:] my brother's son [female speaker:] my sister's son	otōsimimāw	(parallel) nephew
nistim	my niece; my daughter-in-law [male speaker:] my sister's daughter; my son's wife [female speaker:] my brother's daughter;	ostimimāw	(cross) niece; daughter-in-law
nitihkwatim	my nephew; my son-in-law [male speaker:] my sister's son [female speaker:] my brother's son	otihkwatimimāw	(cross) nephew; son-in-law
nicāpān	my great grandparent; my great grandchild; my great grandmother; my great granddaughter; my great grandfather; my great grandson	ocāpānimāw	great grandparent; great grandchild
nitāniskocāpān	my great great grandparent my great great grandchild	otāniskocāpānimāw	great great grandparent; great great grandchild
nikihc-āniskocāpān	my great great great grandparent; my ancestor; my great great great grandchild	kihc-āniskocāpān	great great great grandparent; ancestor; great great great grandchild

Spelling Rules

7.1 Cree Spelling Rules

The following spelling rules for the Cree SRO have been encountered in the text of this book. They are repeated here for easy reference. Following this list, we will review each rule in turn, and the list itself is repeated on the back cover for ease of reference.

- 1) The **SRO Cree Alphabet** consists of these and only these letters:
a, ā, c, ē, h, i, ī, k, m, n, o, ō, p, s, (š), t, w, y, (ǫ)
 [Note1: š and ǫ are used only for the appropriate dialects.]
 [Note2: ē is **always** written with the macron!]
- 2) The following English letter symbols are **never** used:
 b, d, f, g, j, q, u, v, x, z
 [Note: l and r are only used in borrowings or the appropriate Cree dialect.]
- 3) **Never use digraphs** (i.e. combinations of two letters) **to represent a single sound.**
 [Exception: “th” for the Woods Cree [ǫ] sound in those areas that do not use the symbol ǫ]
- 4) **Never use capitalization when writing in Cree!**
- 5) **Do not drop unstressed “i” from the spelling of a word!**
 A “silent-i” can still be important for indicating stress patterns.
- 6) **Never use apostrophes when writing in Cree!**
- 7) **Never hyphenate person marking prefixes!**
- 8) **Hyphenate preverbs and prenouns.**
 Use hyphens to help indicate word formation and stress patterns.
- 9) **“i before y” and “o before w”**
 These spellings should be used if other means of determining vowel length are unavailable (i.e. these are stem-internal spelling rules, and can be overridden by other rules, e.g. verb inflection).
- 10) **Be consistent!**
- 11) **If in doubt about a spelling, Look it up!**

7.2 Review of the Spelling Rules

1) Cree SRO

- a) In general, the symbols used in the SRO may have similarities to English sounds, but this is not necessarily true. When writing in Cree, these symbols are meant to represent Cree sounds, and the English use of the symbols is irrelevant. *nēhiyawēwin ōma, namōya ōma ākaýāsīmowin!* With that in mind, SRO symbols like **p**, **t** and **k** are not meant to represent the exact same sounds in Cree as they do in English. The symbols are simply useful tools that we use to record the language. The true importance of the language remains in its oral form and respect is given to all dialects. The SRO, however, is a tool to facilitate communication in one medium across the dialects and therefore it is not meant to reflect the exact speech of any one dialect or any one speaker. It reflects the structure of the language as a whole (with some concessions to dialect still available).
- ā) **ċ** is used for a range of sound between the “ts”-like sound of Plains Cree to the “ch”-like sound of most of the other dialects. The difference between the “ts” and “ch”-like sounds never signals a difference in meaning, so different symbols are not needed. Regardless of how you pronounce the sound, the symbol **ċ** is used. You can compare this with the English pronunciation of the “a” in “tomato” as either [a] or [e] depending on dialect, but the spelling does not change.
- c) **š** is only used in Eastern dialects where **s** and **š** are distinct sounds. Since **s** and **š** never make a difference in meaning in western dialects, **s** can be used even when you hear something like an English “sh” [š].
- ē) **đ** is a linguistic symbol for the voiced “th” sound in English “this” and “that”, and the “th” sound of Woods Cree *nītha* and *kītha*. Some Woods (or Rock) Cree material has been prepared using this symbol rather than the digraph “th”.
- h) **ē̄** is always written with the length mark (macron or circumflex). This is a long vowel and is written as a long vowel at all times. Writing it with the length mark also helps to distinguish this as the Cree sound, not the English sound. The use of the symbol **ē̄** (rather than the simple “e”) can thus send the additional message: This is Cree, not English!

Note: this vowel does not occur in Woods and Northern Plains Cree, so it is not an issue for these dialects where the vowel symbol **e** (whether long **ē̄** or unmarked) is never used. On the other hand, when speakers of these dialects read material prepared in a dialect that does use **ē̄**, then Woods and Northern Plains Cree speakers can simply treat **ē̄** and **ī̄** as equivalent, while only using **ī̄** in their own writing.

2) Other English Symbols

- a) **l** and **r** occur in Moose and Attikamek dialects of Cree respectively, but they only occur in borrowings (such as in names) in most other dialects.
- ā) Some English symbols are never used because they represent sounds that are never heard in Cree. Such symbols include: **f**, **j**, **v**, and **z**. Others represent shortcuts that are not needed, as with **q** and **x**. The combination **kw** is very common in Cree but it is always written out in full, not replaced by “q” or “qu”. A combination of **k** and **s** may appear in rapid speech, but this is due to contraction and the combination “ks” (or the shortcut symbol “x”) will never be needed. Finally, some symbols represent sounds that are similar to Cree sounds, but which are still not used. These will be described in the following notes.
- c) **b** and **d** are sounds that some claim they hear in Cree. Three things can be said about this. 1) **b** and **d** are symbols not sounds. They could, with general agreement, represent any sounds we want them to. 2) The more “voiced” sounds that these symbols typically represent are not very common in the western dialects, though they may be more prevalent in the eastern dialects. 3) In all dialects of Cree, there is no distinction made between such sound pairs as typically represented by the symbols “p” and “b”, and “t” and “d”. Anyone hearing these sounds is listening with an English ear for a sound difference that is important to English. Since it is not important to Cree, distinct symbols are not needed. Thus, **p** is used, but not “b”, and **t** is used, but not “d”. This same principle applies to **k** and “g”, but this will be discussed in more detail in the next note.
- ē) **g** is a symbol that many wish to use when writing Cree. It is true that the more “voiced” sound typically represented by the “g” symbol is more prevalent in the western dialects than **b** or **d**, especially in Swampy Cree as spoken at Cumberland House. However, the same principle applies here. Regardless of whether you hear something closer to an English “k” or “g” sound, these two sounds do not contrast in Cree. The two symbols are necessary for English as they represent two sounds which contrast and can make a difference in meaning (e.g. “kill” and “gill” are different words in English). In Cree, however, two words will never differ in meaning based on the difference between “k” and “g”. Simply stated, Cree only requires one of these symbols, and **k** is the one that is used. In certain places within words, it may sound more like an English “g”, but this is not English, nor should a feature of English be allowed to needlessly complicate an appropriate Cree writing system.

Note: another problem with the English symbol “g” is that it does not only represent the sound in “gill”, but also the “j” sound in words like “gin” and “gym”, or even both sounds in words like “gorge” and “gorgeous”. Thus, using the “g” symbol introduces some uncertainty that does not exist with the **k** symbol. For instance, if we spell *akimik* as “agimik”, many might try to pronounce it as “ajimik”, which is incorrect. The “g” symbol is a problem best left to English.

- h) **u** is another problematic symbol with many English uses. It is true that it is often used for the sound found in English words like “up” and “jump”, but it also occurs in words like “put”, “suit”, and “unique”, which are all different sounds. This symbol is in fact usually used, in all languages except English and French, for the sound usually spelled “oo” in English and “ou” in French (cf. English “moose” and French “mousse”, as opposed to English “mouse”). This “oo” or [u] sound does not occur in Cree, so the symbol “u” is unnecessary. The short **a** symbol is used for a sound very much like the first sound in “appeal”, but note that this is meant to represent a Cree sound, not an English sound. After all, *namṓya ōma ē-ākayāsīmowasinahikēyahk; ē-nēhiyawasinahikēyahk ōma ēkwa*.

3) Digraphs

- a) The word “digraph” means “two-marks” or “two-writings” meaning that two (or more) symbols are used to indicate a single sound. English digraphs include the following:

ch, sh, tch, ng, ph, gh, bb, cc, dd, ff, gg, ck, ll, mm, nn, pp, rr, ss, tt, zz

aa, ae, ai, ao, au, ea, ee, ei, eo, eu, ia, ie, ii, io, iu, oa, oe, oi, oo, ou, ua, ue, ui, uo, uu

Some of these are immediately useless for Cree since they are either double letters which are not used in the SRO to begin with (e.g. bb, dd, gg) or represent other sounds which do not occur in Cree (e.g. ng, ph). All of the vowel digraphs can be discarded since we use a single symbol (long or short) for each Cree vowel and combinations of symbols are not necessary. Finally, some sounds that Cree shares (or nearly shares) with English are still not marked by English digraphs, for single symbols are available to improve on the English usage. Thus, in 1) above, the Cree symbol **c** stands for what must be written as “ch”, “tch”, or even “ts” in English. Such symbols as **t**, **s**, and **h** represent particular sounds and these must not be confused with the equally important Cree sound represented by **c**.

- ā) There is only one exception to the “no digraph” rule of Cree spelling and that is the use of “th” for the voiced [ð] sound in Woods Cree (e.g. *nīthā*, *thīkaw*). This is the lone holdover from English spelling and it is used solely for Woods Cree, which is the only dialect that has this sound. Some publications (such as those out of Brandon and Winnipeg) have even done away with this sole exception by replacing “th” with the linguistic symbol **ð**. Although this is an unfamiliar symbol to most, it is a single symbol for the single [ð] sound, which is, after all, the sound in English “this”, but not the sound in English “thin”.

4) Capitalization

- a) Capitalization serves several purposes in English, but other languages do not always follow the conventions of English capitalization. For instance, days of the week are capitalized in English (e.g., *Monday*) but not in French (e.g. *lundi*). In German, all nouns have been capitalized regardless of their position in a sentence (e.g. *der Mann* “the man”, *die Frau* “the woman”). What examples such as these illustrate is that, like other aspects of a spelling system, capitalization is a tool to be used in any number of ways depending on the needs of the system. And if the system does not require it, it can be ignored.

- a) What capitalization introduces is a second symbol, often very different from the lower case symbol (cf. **r** with **R**, etc.), for what is essentially the same sound. One of the founding principles upon which the SRO was based was “one sound, one symbol” and thus the use of different symbols (lower case and upper case) for the same sound was avoided. This actually corresponds closely with the Syllabic writing system, since it is impossible to capitalize syllabic symbols. The symbols of the Cree syllabary consist of large and small symbols, but these are not interchangeable and have very different functions. One never capitalizes a Cree Syllabic spelling, for any reason, and the SRO matches the Syllabic system in this regard. But in addition to these important aspects of Cree writing, there are other reasons why capitalization is unnecessary or even inappropriate for writing in Cree.
- c) One of the primary uses for capitalization is to mark the **beginning of a sentence**. However, this is actually doubly marked in English, since the end of a sentence is marked by a **period**. Capitals are therefore not strictly necessary, since the first sentence in any writing is obviously the beginning, and every subsequent sentence follows a period. The period can then be taken to mark not just the end of one sentence, but the beginning of the next, or rather the boundary between sentences. Thus, any argument in favour of capitalization at the beginning of sentences is based on English convention rather than on necessity. Again, the SRO is not for English (though English spellers could definitely learn some useful things from SRO conventions).
- e) The other main use for capitals is to mark the **names** for certain people, places, and other things as somehow **more important or special**. In a sense, this is why all nouns have been capitalized in German, to set the names of things apart from other parts of speech. Such solutions could be introduced for Cree as well. We could, for instance, like German, capitalize all nouns (e.g. “ana Nāpēw kī-wāpamēw Mahihkana”). Or perhaps, given the greater importance of verbs to Cree grammar, we could capitalize all verbs instead (e.g. “ana nāpēw kī-Wāpamēw mahihkana”). Or returning to nouns, perhaps we could highlight the important difference between animate and inanimate nouns by capitalizing only the animate ones (“ēkosi ēsa ana Mahihkan sīpiy kī-wāpahtam”). Or delving further into the grammar, perhaps we should only capitalize the proximate nouns, but not obviative ones (“ana Nāpēw kī-wāpamēw mahihkana”). The possibilities are virtually endless, but all require fairly detailed grammatical information to support such rules. If none of them are applied, however, the resulting rule - “no capitals” - is by far the simplest to learn. In fact, without capitals, there remain only 17 distinct symbols in the western Cree SRO, rather than 34, and no rules of when to use capitals at all.
- h) The issue of the **capitalization of names** deserves some further mention. From the conventions of European languages like English, French, German and Spanish, we are used to capitalizing our names. We are used, in fact, to treating these names as more important than other, non-capitalized, things. This can be viewed as a reflection of the hierarchical nature of the belief system of “western” civilization. But this is not a necessary feature of the belief systems of most

indigenous peoples and it is certainly not a feature of Cree belief. The Elders teach us that we are not above the other things in our world, nor should we seek to place ourselves above them. If anything, human beings are dependent on all other things on Earth. Remembering and following these teachings, it would then seem incorrect to mark our names in any way to set them apart from or above all these interconnected things that we rely on for life. One of the authors of this paper, for instance, is sometimes called *mahihkan*. In English, we might write “Wolf sees the wolves,” capitalizing only the man’s name, and not the name of the animals to whom he owes that name. But in Cree, do we rank them in this way? Certainly the author would not wish to place himself above his namesakes. Should our writing not reflect aspects of Cree cultural belief rather than English belief? In order to better reflect the egalitarianism in our Elders’ teachings, we must either capitalize everything, or nothing at all. And so, we have a very simple and very appropriate rule for writing in Cree - **never use capitals!**

5) Silent Letters

a) If we are trying to avoid the sins of the English spelling system, why do we introduce symbols where no sounds typically occur, as in *tānisi* and *tānitē* and elsewhere? The answer has to do with the use of the SRO as a spelling system for the Cree language as a whole and not a representation of any single dialect or any single individual’s speech. The principle “one symbol, one sound” is useful, but it has been misinterpreted to mean “spell exactly what you hear”. But if everyone spells exactly what they think they hear, even individuals in the same community will continue to disagree on appropriate spellings, let alone individuals from different dialects. Instead, certain spellings have more to do with the structure of Cree as a whole than with what we might hear in rapid speech. With that in mind, various aspects of the structure of Cree can override sound in determining the most appropriate spelling.

ā) One important factor in determining spelling is to recognize **the way in which words are formed**. This is the reason behind the apparently “silent-i” in words like *tānisi* and *tānitē*. We know that the question element *tān-* is used to create many Cree interrogative pronouns (e.g., *tānima*, *tāniwā*, *tānēhki*, *tānispī(hk)*, etc.). We can also observe important particles like *isi*, *itē*, and *ispī(hk)* used elsewhere in isolation. Thus, larger words are formed by the combination of smaller elements:

<i>tān-</i>	+	<i>isi</i>	→	<i>tānisi</i>	“how, in what manner”
<i>tān-</i>	+	<i>itē</i>	→	<i>tānitē</i>	“where, in what location”

So these spellings recognize the occurrence of the initial **î** of particles like *isi* and *itē*. The reason they do not occur in normal or rapid speech is due to the loss of this short vowel when in a position in the word where it does not receive any stress.

c) In the words exemplified above, the main stress occurs on the first (or third-last) syllable, with some secondary stress on the last syllable. This is a common pattern of three-syllable words in Cree. Two-syllable words, on the other hand, usually only have a single primary stress on the last syllable. Thus, the stress

pattern of Cree also suggests that words like *tānisi* and *tānitē* are, in origin at least, three-syllable words. This is interesting, since it means that one aspect of the Cree sound system (the stress pattern in general) can tell us something about the word that is obscured by another aspect of the Cree sound system (the reduction of syllables when unstressed). And this is precisely why certain spellings are suggested with apparently “silent” letters. They are justified by other patterns in Cree, and they can tell us something about the pronunciation of a word that their absence would obscure.

6) Apostrophes and Contraction

- a) There are a limited number of acceptable abbreviations in English writing which utilize the apostrophe. Children are taught these alongside the expanded forms, since both forms are commonly used. In formal speech and particularly in writing, however, the contracted forms are avoided. There are three lessons here for those who wish to use apostrophes when writing in Cree and each is addressed below.
- ā) We must first of all know what the contracted forms are contracted from, and this means we must have consistent spellings for the full, non-contracted forms in place before worrying about which words to write as contractions and how to write them. We are clearly not at the stage when enough people know the SRO and use it consistently, so it is not yet worthwhile to try and complicate the system by determining rules for contraction.
- c) For one thing, many contractions and modified spellings are meant to highlight particular types of speech or dialect. This can be useful, but it can also serve to make written material too specific to a particular area, and reduce its usefulness. The SRO is an attempt to overcome some of the regional and dialect differences and allow for greater communication between different Cree-speaking communities, as well as provide a system in which official documents can be kept and made available to the widest possible audience. Ultimately, such a system is necessary if Cree is to attain official language status. This would be an important step towards protecting and promoting the use of Cree, and helping to ensure its continued existence for the generations to come.
- ē) If, in the future, we are to recognize contractions at all, we must agree on where and how to write contractions. As with many of the points above, we must first ask whether or not we should simply borrow the English means of marking contractions with an apostrophe. Again, the answer lies in the structure of Cree, not in English. There is a particular type of contraction that is very common to Cree (the technical linguistic term is “sandhi”) which is very different than what occurs in English. Some attempts have been made to represent this process in a way appropriate to Cree and this does not involve the use of an apostrophe. In contrast, most attempts to use the apostrophe when writing Cree involve the predictable loss of the short unstressed *ī* that is so common in speech. So common is this, in fact, that if we are not careful, we might end up replacing almost all short *ī* symbols with apostrophes. If that is the case, why not abandon the symbol *ī* and use the apostrophe for that particular sound, lost or otherwise?

Or perhaps, we can just stick with **i**, since it is commonly deleted, but is ultimately recoverable as described earlier (in Chapter 4 and in rule 5 above). The very predictability of its deletion is an important feature of the Cree language. If we include it in a spelling, we can, predictably, omit it in pronunciation. But if we do not include it, can we as easily and accurately reinstate it in pronunciation for those areas that do not delete it? For instance, some of us, given the right context would easily understand if we heard someone ask “Jeetchet?” But we would still write the question out as “Did you eat yet?” From this, no matter how we might pronounce it, we can easily understand what is being asked.

- h) Ultimately, it comes down to a recognition of the fact that oral and written language are two different things with their own rules. In regard to the oral language, we respect all the different dialects. In regard to the written form, we disrespect them all and choose forms that allow us best to predict all the different forms possible, facilitating cross-dialectal communication. Sometimes, the written form is based on features of Plains Cree, sometimes on features of Woods Cree, and sometimes on features of Swampy Cree. Remember, regardless of how you say “tomato”, we all read and understand the same word. That is the power of the English writing system, despite all its quirks. The SRO is far more systematic, and only less powerful until we all use it consistently.

7) Hyphenation 1

- a) When the **person-marking prefixes** are written as *ni-*, *ki-*, and *o-*, the hyphen is meant only to indicate that they are bound forms which cannot occur on their own. For instance, if someone asks, “*awīna ē-nitawēyimāt pikiwa?*”, you cannot answer by saying “*ni!*”. This is incorrect because *ni-* is a bound form and must be attached to something else to be used properly (for instance, “*níya*” or “*nīnitawēyimāw*”). However, this does not mean that these prefixes must be written with hyphens whenever they are used. Thus, writing a word like “*ni-nitawēyimāw*” with the hyphen is just as incorrect as writing the personal pronoun as “*ni-ya*”. The hyphen is just a linguistic tool for indicating these prefixes are bound, but this is not carried over to the spelling system and these prefixes are always attached directly to the next element in a word. Note that, in this way, the person-marking prefixes are just like the suffixes which are attached directly to nouns and verbs without hyphens. We do not write the plural *maskisina* as “*maskisin-a*”, nor do we write the possessive *nimaskisin* as “*ni-maskisin*”. Without hyphens they are correct, with hyphens they are wrong.
- ā) One test which shows that the person-markers are different than other prefixed elements is to compare what happens when two vowels are brought together. This occurs when a vowel-final prefix is attached to a vowel-initial element (verb, noun or other particle). When this is done with a preverb and verb, or prenoun and noun (see Hyphenation 2 immediately below), the two vowels can be kept separate or collapsed together, as in these examples:

$$\begin{array}{l} \textit{ati-} + \textit{atoskē-} + \textit{-w} \rightarrow \textit{ati-atoskēw} \quad \text{or} \quad \textit{at-ātoskēw} \\ \textit{kihci-} + \textit{okimāw-} \rightarrow \textit{kihci-okimāw} \quad \text{or} \quad \textit{kihc-ōkimāw} \end{array}$$

However, when the person markers are attached to a vowel-initial element, the

two vowels cannot collapse together, as they are separated by a [t] connector which forms part of the person prefixes:

$$\begin{array}{rcll}
 ni- & + & atosk(\bar{e}/\bar{a})- + -n & \rightarrow ni\dot{\tau}atosk\bar{a}n \\
 ni- & + & ati- + atosk(\bar{e}/\bar{a})- + -n & \rightarrow ni\dot{\tau}ati-atosk\bar{a}n \\
 ni- & + & + astotin- & \rightarrow ni\dot{\tau}astotin
 \end{array}$$

Essentially, when the person prefixes are added to vowel-initial elements, they take the special forms *niṭ-*, *kiṭ-*, and *ot-*. But these are the only prefixes which have these special forms and they can therefore be treated differently from other prefixed elements. As discussed immediately below, other prefixed elements are indicated by hyphens. Person-marking prefixes are not.

8) Hyphenation 2

- a) Though person-marking prefixes are not written with the hyphen, other bound elements will be. **Preverbs** and **prenouns**, those particles which are attached before verbs and nouns, respectively, are always hyphenated, as exemplified above. If a string of preverbs are used, for instance, they will all be kept separate by hyphens, with the exception of any person-marking prefix which is present.

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 ni- + w\bar{i}- + kakw\bar{e}- + nitawi- + kiyokaw- + -\bar{a} + -w \\
 \rightarrow niw\bar{i}-kakw\bar{e}-nitawi-kiyokaw\bar{a}w
 \end{array}$$

Note again that there are no hyphens used to attach the person-marking prefix to the first preverb (*wṭ-*) or between the verb stem (*kiyokaw-*) and all suffixes. But there are always hyphens separating other preverbs from each other and from the verb stem. This is due in part to the fact, illustrated above, that person-marking prefixes are somewhat different from other preverbs, but it is also useful in helping to distinguish the various meanings introduced by each preverb. When hyphens are not used, it can be very difficult to tell where certain boundaries (of sound and meaning) are within a word, which in turn slows the ability to both comprehend and read aloud. For instance, the word above, written without hyphens, would look like this:

niwṭkakwṭnitawikiyokawṭ

The hyphens contribute a great deal by isolating the meaningful elements within a word which go into making its overall meaning.

9) “i before y” and “o before w”

- a) These are special rules meant to simplify the amount that anyone has to learn when they encounter sounds which are indeterminate in quality or length. When either **ī** or **ī̄** occurs before **y**, both vowels sound long. This is particularly a problem in Plains Cree or the Y-dialect, where **y** even more frequently occurs following these vowels. Similarly, when **o** or **ō** occurs before **w**, both vowels sound long and it is impossible to tell the difference in the quality of the vowel unless you can isolate it from the **w**.

- a) In Plains Cree, the following words all have a vowel that sounds long before the **y**. However, only some of these are actually long in other dialects, while some are in fact short.

	<u>Plains Cree</u>	<u>Woods Cree</u>	<u>Swampy Cree</u>
“I”	<i>niya</i>	<i>nītha</i>	<i>nīna</i>
“good”	<i>miyo</i>	<i>mītho</i>	<i>mino</i>
“give it to them”	<i>miyik</i>	<i>mīthik</i>	<i>mīnik</i>
“bird”	<i>piyēsīs</i>	<i>pīthīsīs</i>	<i>pinēsīs</i>

In Woods and Swampy Cree, the vowels can be spelled long or short as appropriate, but a Plains Cree speaker cannot be expected to know which vowels are long or short. Thus, the rule “i before y” is invoked when vowel length is indeterminate before **y**. The reverse could have been chosen (i.e. to write them all long), but in either case it allows for a consistent treatment and simplification of spelling.

- c) This rule is not specifically of benefit only to Plains Cree speakers. There are occasionally words in Woods Cree in which a vowel which sounds like $\bar{\mathbf{i}}$ occurs before a **y**. One example is *piyak*, the equivalent of Plains and Swampy Cree *pēyak*. Given that the equivalent vowel in Plains and Swampy Cree is $\bar{\mathbf{e}}$, one might expect to use $\bar{\mathbf{i}}$ in Woods Cree. However, this would assume that Woods Cree speakers should know what the equivalent vowel is in the other dialects. As we did not require this of Plains Cree speakers, we will certainly not require it of Woods Cree speakers either. Thus, the “i before y” rule can be invoked to allow for a simplification of what must be learned.

- e) There are instances, however, in all dialects, where the vowels $\dot{\mathbf{i}}$ and $\bar{\mathbf{i}}$ both sound long, but it is still possible to determine the exact vowel by isolating it from the **y**. This happens when the vowel occurs at the end of a verb stem and the **y** is part of a suffix added to it.

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \bar{\mathbf{e}}- + \mathit{api}- & + & -\mathit{y}\bar{\mathbf{a}}n & \rightarrow & \bar{\mathbf{e}}-\mathit{api}\bar{\mathbf{y}}\bar{\mathbf{a}}n \\ \bar{\mathbf{e}}- + \mathit{tapas}\bar{\mathbf{i}}- & + & -\mathit{y}\bar{\mathbf{a}}n & \rightarrow & \bar{\mathbf{e}}-\mathit{tapas}\bar{\mathbf{i}}\bar{\mathbf{y}}\bar{\mathbf{a}}n \end{array}$$

Though both vowels might sound long before **y** in these forms, we can isolate the verb stems in other forms without a following **y**, such as imperatives (*api!*, *tapas̄!*) or first person forms (*nitapin*, *nitapas̄in*) which confirm that the final vowel of *api* is short $\dot{\mathbf{i}}$, while the final vowel of *tapas̄* is long $\bar{\mathbf{i}}$. In such instances when we can determine the vowel length, the “i before y” rule is not needed, and the verb stems are written consistently with the appropriate vowel.

- h) The “o before w” rule functions in the same way. If the vowel length can be determined by isolating the vowel from the **W**, then the correct vowel can be used. For instance, though the vowels may both sound long in words like *nikamow* and *pasikōw* due to the *-w* third person suffix, command forms (*nikamo!*, *pasikō!*) and first person forms (*ninikamon*, *nipasikōn*) allow us to hear the correct vowel length, unaffected by a **W**. As with “i before y”, though, there are sometimes forms in which the vowel cannot be separated from the following **W** and so the

actual length of the vowel cannot be told. In such instances, typically within noun or verb stems, the “o before w” rule is used.

10) Consistency!

How much time have we all spent learning to spell English correctly? What a great amount of respect we have paid to the English language, its speakers, and all the idiosyncracies of the spelling system. Now if only people would believe that Cree was just as worthy of that same respect, that same effort. If that were done, the SRO is certainly much more consistent in its rules, and would still take far less time to master than the English spelling system. Many of the rules discussed above are completely without exceptions. It is simply a matter of getting into the habit of using them. The more we practice something, the better we get at it. The more we use the SRO, the more natural it becomes. *māci-nēhiyawasinahikētān!*

11) If in doubt, Look it up!

And finally, we are now beginning to have the same help that we all get when we are not sure of how to spell an English word. We can look it up in a dictionary. Resource materials in the SRO are becoming more available all the time. Currently, the largest published SRO glossary, listed here, consists of over 16,000 Cree words:

nēhiyawēwin: itwēwina / Cree: Words. Compiled by Arok Wolvengrey. Regina:
Canadian Plains Research Center, 2001. ISBN: 0-88977-127-8

This two volume set (1: Cree-English; 2: English-Cree) can be ordered from the CPRC at the following addresses:

<u>by mail</u>	<u>by phone</u>
Canadian Plains Research Center	(306) 585-4758
University of Regina	toll free: 1-866-874-2257
3737 Wascana Parkway	
Regina, SK	<u>by fax</u>
S4S 0A2	(306) 585-4699

search for this book online at
<http://www.cprc.ca/search.php>
(search for books under “Cree”)

This first edition is just a beginning and additions will be made in the future. This process has already begun with the launch of a Cree online dictionary resource which includes all the entries from Cree-English volume of Cree: Words. You can view this resource at:

www.credictionary.com

Please be aware that, as of the original publication of this guide, not all entries to this online resource have been edited for the proper use of the SRO, but all entries coded “CW” (for Cree: Words) are reliable.

SRO Bibliography and Resources

In the summer of 1925, the linguist Leonard Bloomfield collected a large number of Cree texts at Sweet Grass Reserve, Saskatchewan. From this fieldwork, he published two text collections utilizing a writing system which was essentially the same as the SRO that we use today, needing only minor modifications and standardization. These collections are:

Bloomfield, Leonard. 1930. *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree*. National Museum of Canada Bulletin 60. Ottawa.

-----, 1934. *Plains Cree Texts*. American Ethnological Society Publications 16. New York.

Most of the necessary modifications had been suggested by the time a panel of Elders, language instructors, and linguists met in Edmonton in 1973 to discuss the form of the SRO. C. Douglas Ellis recorded the result of this discussion in a linguistic paper, and David Pentland provided a slightly more accessible version:

Ellis, C. Douglas. 1973. "A proposed standard Roman orthography for Cree." *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3.4:1-37.

Pentland, David. 1977. *nēhiyawasinahikēwin: A Standard Orthography for the Cree Language*. Regina: Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

From this time, the SRO has been available for use, though some variation in its exact implementation continues through to this very day, and many materials continue to be produced which either ignore the SRO entirely or apply it in a less than systematic way. Leading in the attempts to promote the proper use of the SRO, through publication and education, have been Dr. Freda Ahenakew and Dr. H.C. Wolfart (at the University of Manitoba) and Dr. Jean Okimāsis and Solomon Ratt (at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, now known as the First Nations University of Canada). These names and others working in the field of Cree language studies and instruction feature prominently in the following list of publications which utilize the Standard Roman Orthography for Cree. The list is organized under the three broad topics of "Cree Texts" (books primarily in Cree), "Cree Grammar" (books meant to teach the language, including dictionaries), and "Miscellaneous" (books in English citing Cree names or other vocabulary). However, this list is not meant to be completely exhaustive and, if we have overlooked some publications, we will be happy to add to this list as the number of publications, and publishers respecting the Cree language with the appropriate spelling system, continues to grow.

Following the bibliography, we provide some contacts for Cree language professionals who can help with the editing of materials. In this respect, we would like to make special mention of the Department of Indian Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics at the First Nations University of Canada, and all of the staff of the "Gift of Language and Culture" project at the La Ronge Indian Band. This latter group in particular is responsible for a growing list of SRO publications already too numerous to include in the bibliography below. Please seek further details through the contacts listed on page 68.

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Cree Spelling Rules

- 1) The **Cree Alphabet** consists of these and only these letters:

a, ā, c, ē, h, i, ī, k, m, n, o, ō, p, s, t, w, y

[Note1: **š** and **ǫ** are also used, but only for the appropriate dialects.]

[Note2: **ē** is **always** written with the length mark!]

- 2) The following English letter symbols are **never** used:

b, d, f, g, j, q, u, v, x, z

[Note: **l** and **r** are only used in borrowings or the appropriate Cree dialect.]

- 3) **Never use digraphs** (combinations of two letters) to represent a single sound.

[Exception: “th” for the Woods Cree [ǫ] sound in those areas that do not use the symbol **ǫ**]

- 4) **Never use capitalization** when writing in Cree!

- 5) **Do not drop unstressed “i”** from the spelling of a word!

A “silent-i” can still be important for indicating stress patterns.

- 6) **Never use apostrophes** when writing in Cree!

- 7) **Never hyphenate person marking prefixes!**

- 8) **Hyphenate preverbs and pre-nouns.**

Use hyphens to help indicate word formation and stress patterns.

- 9) **“i before y” and “o before w”**

These spellings should be used if other means of determining vowel length are unavailable (i.e. these are stem-internal spelling rules, and can be overridden by other rules, e.g. verb inflection).

- 10) **Be consistent!**

