

## A Note on Orthography

We have made a number of decisions related to Cree spelling that differ from previous editions of this work. First, we have decided to privilege the use of Cree syllabics. While we do include an alphabetic spelling for each syllabic headword, these are secondary and meant to offer a rudimentary access to readers who are not literate in Cree syllabics. The alphabetic spelling is largely a direct conversion of the syllabic spellings, with the exception of its treatment of the geminate *š*, discussed below. The cross-referencing of variants and synonyms, as well as the glossing of the English-Cree dictionary are all fully in syllabics.

The particular syllabic orthography used for East Cree dialects is the eastern system. This orthography differs from the western system by including the changes made to the latter in the 1850s by John Horden (1828-1893), an Anglican missionary stationed at Moose Factory. Horden's changes included changing the distinct smaller consonantal characters into ones that match the larger syllabic characters. He would also change the order in which the diacritic representing the onset /w/ was placed, from originally being placed after a syllable to intuitively placing it before the syllable. Additionally, the syllabic character representing the aspirate /h/ is used here.

Second, we have opted for spellings that make full use of the syllabic characters, notably including the superscript final *ʔ*. These decisions do mean that the spellings in this dictionary are somewhat different than those in materials produced using the southern dialect Cree School Board spelling conventions. We are confident, however, that literate Cree speakers will have very little difficulty moving between the two spellings. Readers who wish to better understand the differences between the two spelling systems should begin by focusing on the spelling of familiar vocabulary.

Finally, we have decided to use conservative and morphologically-informed spelling conventions. In this way, the spellings in this dictionary, while fully representing all the distinctions associated with southern James Bay Cree speech, reflect an approach to spelling that is closer to that employed by the Cree School Board for the northern dialect.

The decisions taken regarding orthography were taken primarily out of a desire to be as rigorous and accurate as possible in our representation of Cree words. We believe that the approach to spelling in this dictionary is in fact more representative of southern dialect speech than the Cree School Board convention, which in our experience omits sounds used by older monolingual speakers. Readers should therefore be aware that the choices made regarding spelling are deliberate and rooted in field work with a great many speakers of the southern James Bay dialects.

The representation of sounds is usually fairly straightforward, but the syncopation

or assimilation of certain sounds in the modern dialect can complicate spelling quite a bit. A few decisions were therefore taken to ensure that the spellings used were not only accurate, but as consistent as possible. One such decision concerned the omission, in spoken Cree, of short vowels that follow multiconsonantal onsets ending in w. It was decided that these vowels would be omitted only when they occurred at the boundaries of derivational morphology, where the w is part of the first morpheme and the initial vowel of the following morpheme is short. In these cases the w is replaced by o. However, short vowels have been retained when these occur away from morpheme boundaries and also, as an exception, when followed by the intransitive inanimate verb final ...an, the short a of which continues to be pronounced by many modern speakers. Thus, the more conservative form C<sup>u</sup>·bɔ°, composed of C<sup>u</sup>·d... and ...<ɔ°, would be spelled C<sup>u</sup>dɔ°. On the other hand, the short vowels are retained in words such as <ɔ·ɔ·b° and <ɔ·ɔ·dɔ·ɔ·b°.

Another decision taken in this dictionary involves the representation of the gemination of /š/ as a contraction of historical šš. Conservative monolingual speakers regularly produce the geminate /š/ in their speech (akin to a long šš, the short i having disappeared). We have chosen to represent these in the alphabetic orthography, as šš. Accurately representing a geminate /š/ in the syllabic orthography proved difficult, however, given the traditional requirement in syllabic spelling that consonants be followed by vowels. For this reason, the syllabic spellings offer the historically correct spellings, while the alphabetic represents the contemporary gemination. In this way, the alphabetic spellings can be considered a rudimentary phonetic key to the syllabics, as in this example:

<ɔ·ɔ·ɔ·ɔ·na /acimošš/ *na* (*diminutive*) puppy

Another feature of the alphabetic orthography used here is the rejection of digraphs such as <sh> and <ch> in favour of single letters <š> and <c>, respectively. Not only does this shorten the spelling of words, many of which can be incredibly long due to the compositional nature of this language, it also respects an important feature of the orthographic standards used in other dialects, that of representing each distinctive sound of the language with a single letter. While being more concise, this practice essentially prevents the misreading of a digraph such as <sh> as two sounds, [s] and [h]. Finally, the use of <o> in place of <u> brings the orthography in line with the standards used in Cree dialects to the west. To be clear, these changes do not represent differences in pronunciation and do not affect the syllabic spellings.

### *Conversion to the Cree School Board Southern Dialect Spelling*

Differences with the Cree School Board Southern Dialect spelling conventions are relatively minor, are regular, and should not be difficult for readers to navigate. In particular, attention to the following differences will allow for a ready conversion between the two spelling conventions.

First, we favour a conservative representation of the Old Cree phoneme \*r, which realizes as /y/ in the southern East Cree dialects. When surrounded by short

vowels, some speakers will pronounce a long [i]. For this reason, such words are often spelled with long [i] in the Cree School Board dictionaries. The presence of the y becomes abundantly clear, however, when compared with neighbouring l- or r-dialect vocabulary. For example, consider the entry that follows:

◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ /āmiyihcew/ *vai* s/he fishes at a spawning site

In Opitciwan the word is *āmīrihkew*. The Cree School Board dictionary includes the word as ◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ with a long ī in place of the -iyi-. In our experience, some elderly speakers pronounce y's clearly, while others produce the long ī. Once you familiarize yourself with the difference, it is very easy to recognize the presence of short vowel y combinations and to then pronounce and adapt them as you see fit.

When the /y/ is found at the end of a word, we have opted for the superscript final ᵝ. Especially when following a short [i], southern East Cree speakers will pronounce the iy combination as a long [i]. For this reason, the Cree School Board convention generally writes these words as ending in a long [i]. Again, comparisons with neighbouring l- and r-dialects confirm the presence of the y. Consider the following example:

◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ /namepiy/ **na 1** white sucker (*Catostomus commersonii*)  
 → PLATE 53 **2** sucker  
 — ORIGIN —  
 Old Cree, \**namēpira*.

In Moose Factory it is *namepil*. In the etymology we have indicated the historic form with the \*r. The Cree School Board dictionary presents it as ◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ.

Words ending in the Old Cree \*r are not the only words we spell with a final ᵝ. Recognizing the phonological rule that Cree words end in consonants, we have opted to use the syllabic superscripts ᵝ and ° for many words where the Cree School Board spellings end in a vowel. In this way, we are privileging the use of superscript finals at the end of words as a general rule. While the word final iy combination is generally pronounced by southern East Cree speakers as a long [i], this is not always true of words that end with ay:

◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ /akahkway/ *na* leech → *variant* ◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᵝ

The Cree School Board spells this name ◁ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ. Again, we would submit that the ay ending better represents conservative monolingual speech in southern inland East Cree. Ultimately, however, the difference is minor.

Finally, we are also conservative in our inclusion of short vowels. Over the course of our work with elderly southern East Cree speakers, we have regularly been confronted by the fact that short vowels that are not included in the Cree School Board southern dialect spellings continue to be clearly pronounced by many. As we have decided to privilege the speech of monolingual elders in this work, we feel that a careful treatment of short vowels is important.

Combinations of a short vowel with [w] mark a regular departure from the School Board spellings. Take for example the name for fallfish:

◁◁▷◦ /āwatōsiw/ *na* (diminutive) fallfish (*Semotilus*  
*corporalis*) → PLATE 53 → variant ▷◁◁▷◦

— ORIGIN —

‘One who carries things,’ named for its habit of piling pebbles into small mounds. As their English name suggests, they are often found at the base of waterfalls or rapids.

The Cree School Board spells the name ▷▷▷◦. Readers will notice that our use of short vowel *w* combinations will often correspond to their use of [u] or long [u]. Our experience suggests that these differences do not pose a significant challenge to fluent readers, and we expect that users of this dictionary can accommodate this usage fairly easily. As with other treatments of short vowels, we find these better represent conservative pronunciation. Finally, note the other difference in the above example, the ...◦ final, in place of their ◦. This is an example of a difference that is frequent and is morphologically significant.

Readers will also notice a frequent use of short [a] where the Cree School Board dictionary uses a short [i]. For example, compare the following with the Cree School Board’s ◁▷◦:

◁▷◦ /piponasiw/ *na* gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) → PLATE 22

— ORIGIN —

Literally, ‘winter bird.’

We are confident in the accuracy of the short [a] spelling, but would like to suggest that this difference is slight and should not be hard to accommodate so long as readers pay attention to vowel length.

To be clear, we are not making an argument that the Cree School Board change their southern dialect standards. Rather we are emphasizing that the conservative spelling adopted in this work is deliberate, has been carefully considered, and is rooted in the speech of the elders we have worked closely with. It is reinforced by our experience in a large number of additional interviews which took place as part of the Cree Place Names program in southern East Cree communities. Further, we are suggesting that the differences, being regular, should not be very difficult for fluent readers to appreciate. As we have emphasized throughout, readers can acclimatize themselves by focusing on vocabulary they know well.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the preceding discussion, while focusing on explaining some of the more common differences, emphasizes areas where the two spelling conventions diverge. In fact, in the majority of cases there will likely be no significant difference in approach.

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