

On the Spelling and Pronunciation of First Nations Languages and Names in Saskatchewan

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The recent publication of Bill Barry's (1997) *People Places* has served to illustrate two distinct written forms which can be used to represent person and place names of First Nations origin. The majority of the Saskatchewan populace will be most familiar with certain names as they have been recorded by English or French speakers trying to render unfamiliar sounds into a more familiar writing system. Often, the recorders were completely unfamiliar with the language(s) that they were attempting to represent, resulting in a rather wide variation in the suggested spellings. Variation in the accuracy of these spellings is more a reflection of the individual who recorded the name (e.g., varying degrees of literacy in the English or French writing systems, personal choice of letters) than of any detailed knowledge of the First Nations source language. For instance, a sound similar to the "sh" in English "shell" might be written "sh" by an English speaker, but "ch" by a French speaker. In most cases, the sometimes wild idiosyncracies of both English and French spelling systems (or English and French spellers) resulted in some equally wild renditions of First Nations names. A simple example is the Cree and Saulteaux word *kéhkéhk* "hawk" which, when recorded as a headman's name on Treaty 6, was spelt "Cakecake."

Furthermore, the variety of English spellings for a single sound is often repeated in the attempts to write First Nations names. For example, the vowel sound represented by the letter "A," (the so-called "long-A" sound), can have the following spellings in English: *way*, *ace*, *wait*, *eh*, and *a* itself (as well as in a great many more weighty examples)! Many, if not all of these, as well as further variations, can be found in the attempted English spellings of Cree names: *Kiwaytinok* (*kiwáinohk*), *Ochapowace* (*ocâpowâs*), *Makaiysis* (*mahkâis*), *Măkanaw* (*măkanaw*), *Assissippi* (*ăsis-sîpiy*). Note that, in every case, the modern Cree transliteration employs one and only one symbol (ê) for this single sound. Compare also *Chacastăpasin* (*cakăstăpăsin*), where the first two instances of English "a" represent Cree *a* and *ă* respectively, while the last two instances represent ê, as reflected somewhat more clearly in the alternate English spelling, *Chacastăpaysin*.

These examples clearly show that European-based spelling does not yield an adequate representation of Cree, and the same holds for all First Nations languages. Each First Nations language is the equal in complexity of any other language, and each has its own unique sound system which can differ markedly from the systems that speakers of English and/or French are used to. Each sound system requires representation in a writing system designed specifically to reflect that system. Nevertheless, it is possible to utilize the roman alphabet, sometimes with necessary modifications and additions, to represent these and any other languages. At least for the Algonquian languages surveyed below (i.e., Cree and Saulteaux), standard Roman orthographies (SROs) have been devised and are in common use. Where no consensus exists on a standard spelling system (e.g., the Siouan dialects: Dakota, Lakhota and Nakoda), it is still possible to suggest a system which will at least serve to highlight the sounds important for each individual language in contrast to those important in English or French. Often, a great many more characters or special diacritic symbols than are found in the 26-character Roman alphabet are required to accurately represent a language. This is illustrated most effectively in our province by the complexity of the sound system of our lone Athapaskan language, Dene. Thus, in order to

counterbalance the often misleading European-based spellings, it is possible and indeed necessary to recognize these differences and to offer a second version of each First Nations name in a spelling system more appropriate to the individual source language. Here, as in Barry (1997), this more accurate transliteration is given in *italics*. These (*italicized*) versions, therefore, are not meant as pronunciation guides for English speakers, as such, but as appropriate representations of the sounds of each First Nations language. However, the reader can estimate a more accurate pronunciation of the original by comparing italicized spellings with the pronunciation guides which follow. These guides are given, for those interested in such matters, to illustrate some of the differences in the sound systems of Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakhota, Nakoda, and Dene, both when compared with English or French, and when compared with one another.

Pronunciation Guides¹

*Cree*²

The majority of First Nations-derived names in Saskatchewan come from the Cree language (*nêhiyawêwin*), and this is an excellent language to begin with, as it has a relatively small number of distinct sounds. The vowels will give English readers the most difficulty as they have values more consistent with those of continental European languages. In this, the spelling of Cree (or what is known as the Standard Roman Orthography) is actually closer to the writing systems of the majority of the world's languages which employ a Roman-based alphabet. In contrast, English and French, with a long written tradition and little spelling reform, have two of the more divergent and idiosyncratic spelling systems.

The most outstanding feature of the Cree vowel system is the distinction between the short (*a, i, o*) and long (*â, ê, i, ô*) vowels, which differ chiefly in the duration for which each is held. Simply put, long vowels are pronounced for a longer period of time (about twice as long as the short vowels). In addition to quantity, however, there is also a slight difference in vowel quality between long and short vowels. The symbols and approximate equivalents for the Cree vowels are as follows:

a - as in English *but*.

â - as in English *father*, though an Irish accent may give a closer approximation; this sound is also pronounced for a longer duration than for the shorter *a*.

ê - as in English *bay*, though without gliding the tongue towards the roof of the mouth at

- 1 In the preparation of these guides, I am indebted to my many mentors, colleagues and students from the Universities of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Regina, with special recognition reserved for those at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC). I have at times relied on a number of written sources, listed subsequently, but I would like to emphasize the aid of several individuals and groups in the decipherment of many of the place names appearing in Bill Barry's (1997) *People Places*. For names of Cree derivation, I am grateful to all the members of the Cree Language Retention Committee, particularly Jean Okimasis, Solomon Ratt, and Doreen Oakes, my colleagues in the Department of Indian Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics at SIFC. For Saulteaux names, I am indebted to my Saulteaux colleagues at DILL: Eliza Smith, Stella Ketchemonia, and especially Margaret Cote-Lerat. Names of Siouan derivation, particularly those from Nakoda, were checked with Leona Kroeskamp, the Nakoda instructor in our department. For the exceptionally few names of Dene origin recorded in the official record of Saskatchewan place names, I was able to consult with Elaine Hay at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Center in Saskatoon. Finally, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Bill Barry, for the interest he has taken in gaining an accurate rendition and translation of First Nations names, for the vast amount of work he put into gathering the names together in the first place, and for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of it and motivating me to write this guide. *kinanâskomitinâwâw. êkosi.*
- 2 Two excellent sources for descriptions of the Cree sound system, as well as many other features of the language, are Bellegarde and Ratt (1992) and Wolfart (1996).

the end of the sound. German *zehn* ("ten") is actually closer, for it is a true long vowel as in Cree.

i - as in English *bit*.

î - as in English *beat*, again without the upward glide of the tongue. German *sieben* ("seven") is more accurate, corresponding closely to the true long vowel of Cree.

o - as in English *book*, though with a large amount of variation in actual pronunciation. Regional and even personal differences can result in a sound closer to the vowel of *boat*, though not sustained like a long vowel (see *ô* immediately below).

ô - as in English *boat*, again without upward glide of tongue. German *Boot* ("boat") is more accurate, corresponding closely to the true long vowel of Cree. As with short *o*, this vowel can also exhibit a great deal of variation in pronunciation, and can seem closer to the vowel sound in English *boot*. This accounts for the common English representation of this sound with the English "oo" or French "ou" spellings. Hence, the first syllable of *Moosomin*, for English speakers, is the same as in the English pronunciation of "moose." However, both derive ultimately from Cree *môswa*, and the first syllable of this word in Plains Cree usually has a sound closer to that in the name *Moses*, not *moose*.

Another complication of the Cree vowel system for English speakers to wrestle with is the effect that certain consonant sounds have in altering the basic pronunciations given above. Thus, when followed by *h*, *w*, and/or *y*, many of the vowels may appear to have a slightly different sound. The basic sound of these consonants is not very different from its sound in English, but the effect on preceding vowels is important and will be noted below.

h - as in English *heat*. This sound rarely occurs at the beginning of Cree words, but unlike the English sound, it does occur immediately before consonants in Cree. This breath of air, or "aspiration", is very important and can signal the difference in meaning between two words: e.g., *nihtiy* "tea" vs. *nihtiy* "my bum."

The effect of an "h-consonant" cluster (*hC*; or "pre-aspirated" consonants, e.g., *hp*, *ht*, *hc*, *hk*) on the preceding vowel is also important for, in most cases, the distinction between long and short vowels is neutralized. In other words, it is usually not possible 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 *âhC* - both sound as in English *father* (like *â*), but short in duration (like *a*).

ihC and *îhC* - both sound as in English *beat*, without the upward glide of the tongue (like *i*) and short in duration (like *i*).

ohC and *ôhC* - both sound as in English *boat*, without the upward glide of the tongue (like *ô*) and short in duration (like *o*).

w - as in English *wow*. When following a vowel, *w* often sounds something like the short *o* or long *ô* vowels. It is very similar to these vowels for they all include "rounding" of the lips in their pronunciation. *w* has the following effects:

aw - as in Canadian English *about*.

âw - as in English *now*.

êw - like a combination of English "ay-oo", and hence the common spelling of Cree words like *nâpêw* ("man") as "Napayo" in English.

îw - this combination varies in pronunciation from a sound similar to that in English *new*, to the sounds of Cree short *o*, or long *ô*. The *w* effectively "rounds" the vowel.

îw - 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 *ô*. Before *w*, both vowels sound long.

ôw - this combination sounds very much as in English *know*, and it is difficult to tell the difference between short *o* and long *ô*. Before *w*, both vowels sound long.

y - as in English *yay*. This sound, when following a vowel, often has a quality much like the short *i* or long *î* 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 *î*, and it is not possible to tell the difference between short *i* and long *î* before *y*. Before *y*, both vowels sound long.

oy - this combination is similar to the sound in English *boy*, or *buoy*.

The remainder of the Cree consonants should present less trouble, though there are still some important differences from the English sound-letter correspondences. The first three consonants, *p*, *t*, and *k*, are always “unaspirated” (i.e., are not followed by a puff of air when spoken). They may therefore sound somewhat closer to “b,” “d” and “g” to some English listeners.

p - as in English *spill*, (not as in *pill* where the “p” sound is followed by a puff of air).

t - as in English *still*, (not as in *till* where the “t” sound is followed by a puff of air).

k - as in English *skill*, (not as in *kill* where the “k” sound is followed by a puff of air).

c - represents a range of sound from “ts,” as at the end of English *cats*, to “ch,” as in English *church* or *catch*. The symbol *c* usually represents a “ts” sound for Plains Cree, while other dialects more commonly have a “ch” sound.

m - as in English *mom*.

n - as in English *nun*.

s - as in English *sis*. This can occasionally sound more like the “sh” sound in *shell*, but these are not two distinct sounds in the western Cree dialects and the difference between “s” and “sh” will never indicate a difference in meaning in Saskatchewan Cree, as it would in English or eastern Cree dialects.

This pronunciation guide thus far is based on the Plains Cree dialect, though much of it holds true for all three dialects of Cree spoken in Saskatchewan. There are, however, some small differences in the sounds of each dialect, of which the most important should be noted. In addition to the sounds present in Plains Cree, Woods Cree has one additional sound:

th - this sequence of letters is the only strict holdover from English spelling convention, and it represents the louder or “voiced th” sound in English *then*, not the whispered or “voiceless th” sound in *thin*.

This sound only occurs in Woods Cree. Where Woods Cree words contain this sound, Plains Cree has *y* and Swampy Cree has *n*. For this reason Plains Cree is often referred to as the “Y” dialect, Swampy Cree as the “N” dialect, and Woods Cree as the “TH” dialect. Two of the most common examples demonstrating this difference are given in the following chart:

	Plains Cree	Swampy Cree	Woods Cree
“I, me”	<i>nîya</i>	<i>nîna</i>	<i>nîtha</i>
“Cree”	<i>nêhiyaw</i>	<i>nêhinaw</i>	<i>nîhithaw</i>

These examples also illustrate three more important points. As noted above, the sequence of *iy* always sounds long, so that even where the other dialects make a distinction between *i* (as in *nêhîñaw*) and *î* (as in *nîñá*), this difference is neutralized in Plains Cree and always spelt with the short *i*. Secondly, Woods Cree is also the only western dialect in which this additional distinct sound (*th*) occurs. In Plains Cree, this sound occurs as *y* and cannot be differentiated from the other *y*-sound which occurs in all dialects. Similarly Woods *th* is *n* in Swampy, which cannot be differentiated from the other *n*-sound common to all dialects. Only from Woods Cree can we tell which Plains *y* or Swampy *n* actually corresponds to *th*. The following chart gives additional examples of *y* and *n* sounds which do not change across the dialects:

	Plains Cree	Swampy Cree	Woods Cree
"one"	<i>pěyak</i>	<i>pěyak</i>	<i>piyak</i>
"two"	<i>nîso</i>	<i>nîso</i>	<i>nîso</i>

Thus, not all Plains Cree *y*-sounds or Swampy Cree *n*-sounds alternate with Woods Cree *th*, and only someone familiar with Woods Cree can tell which is which and which will switch!

The third difference between Woods Cree and the other dialects is illustrated in the form of the words for "Cree (person)" and "one". Where Plains and Swampy have the vowel *ê*, as described above, Woods Cree has long *î*-sound instead (though spelt *i* before *y*). Thus, Woods Cree has one less vowel sound than the other dialects, with Woods *î* corresponding to both *î* and *ê* in Plains and Swampy.

	Plains Cree	Swampy Cree	Woods Cree
"play"	<i>mêtawê</i>	<i>mêtawê</i>	<i>mîtawî</i>
"turn around"	<i>kwêskî</i>	<i>kwêskî</i>	<i>kwîskî</i>

Not all Woods Cree long *î*-sounds correspond with Plains or Swampy long *ê*, and again only someone familiar with Plains or Swampy Cree can tell which is which.

In this discussion, Plains and Swampy Cree may appear to be more closely related, but this is not necessarily the case. Besides the major difference between *y* and *n*, other minor sound changes are evident, such as the tendency in Swampy for the sequence of *wa* to sound more like *o*, or for the consonants *p*, *t*, *c*, and especially *k* to be closer to English "b," "d," "j" and "g" respectively when they occur between vowels. The additional alphabetic symbols familiar to English speakers that do not occur in this description are absent because there are no equivalent sounds required for them in the sound system of western Cree dialects. Eastern dialects also include *š* ("sh"), and can include *l* (Moose Cree) or *r* (Attikamek Cree) but these are not present in the dialects of Saskatchewan.

In addition to sound variation, each of the dialects has a certain amount of difference in vocabulary, just as is found between British, Canadian and Australian English. However, all three Cree dialects of Saskatchewan represent a single language which speakers can, with varying degrees of difficulty, readily understand. In contrast, the Cree language as a whole is closely related to Ojibwa, for both are Algonquian languages; but here the differences in sound and especially in vocabulary are too drastic to allow for mutual intelligibility. Cree and Ojibwa are clearly separate languages, which stand in relation to one another as do English and German. Thus, the various dialects of Cree are related to, but still very different from, the dialect of Ojibwa spoken in Saskatchewan, which is known as *Saulteaux*.

Saulteaux³

The second most common source for First Nations names in Saskatchewan is the Saulteaux dialect (*nahkawêwin*) of the Ojibwa language. As closely related Algonquian languages, Saulteaux and Cree share many of the same features and a similar spelling system.⁴ Below, then, only obvious differences between the two languages will be discussed.

The vowel systems of Cree and Saulteaux are virtually identical and the same description of the basic Cree vowels above can be assumed for Saulteaux. The only drastic difference in pronunciation occurs when the sequence *wâ* changes following a consonant (*Cwâ*). Hence:

wâ - as in the Cree sound system or in English *water*.

Cwâ - after a consonant, the “wâ” sequence changes to a long vowel sound similar to the British pronunciation of *law*; cf. Saulteaux *ohpwâkan* “pipe,” where the underlined sequence “pwâ” is very similar to British *paw*, not Cree “pwâ” (cf. Cree *ospwâkan* “pipe”).

The remaining differences pertain only to the consonant system.

c - as in English *church*, the sound commonly spelt “ch” in English, not “ts” as in the Plains Cree *c*.

š - as in English *shell*, the sound commonly spelt “sh” in English. See also below.

n - as in English *nun*, except when preceding *k*, where it has the same value as the English sequence “ng” in *ring*. It is important to note that the sequence *nk* always represents the sound found in the middle of English *finger*, not as in *singer*. Hence, even at the end of words, *nk* represents a sound combining both English “ng” and hard “g” as in *gill*.

h - this is a very important symbol in the Saulteaux writing system. It does not represent an “h” as in English *heat*, but rather the catch or “glottal stop” that is heard in the middle of English “uh-uh” or “oh-oh.” This sound, or lack of sound (being a brief complete stoppage of airflow) can also be heard more frequently in certain British dialects, such as Cockney, where it often replaces “t” between vowels.⁵ Since “h” does not represent the same sound as in Cree, it does not have the same effect on preceding vowels as discussed above.

The symbol *h* is also very important in distinguishing two sets of sounds in Saulteaux. Where *h* precedes a consonant, there is again a very slight glottal catch preceding a sound almost identical to the Cree sounds represented by the same consonant. So:

hp = Cree *p* with slight glottal catch preceding.

ht = Cree *t* with slight glottal catch preceding.

hk = Cree *k* with slight glottal catch preceding.

hc = Saulteaux *c* (or English “ch”) with slight glottal catch preceding.

hs = Cree and Saulteaux *s* with slight or no glottal catch preceding.

hš = Saulteaux *š* with slight or no glottal catch preceding.

3 The following discussion of Saulteaux sounds is adapted from information from my colleagues and from the description in Cote (1984).

4 There are, in fact, two competing spelling systems in use for Saulteaux, the respective merits of which continue to be discussed (cf. Wolvengrey 1997). The spelling system in use here is that taught at SIFC and found in the aforementioned text by Cote (1984).

5 This is not uncommon in the languages of the world, also being found in the Siouan dialects and in Dene (see further below). Hence, Cree is the only First Nations language of Saskatchewan for which this glottal stop is not an important sound.

In contrast to the occurrence of these symbols following *h*, they may have slightly different pronunciations when standing alone.

p - at the beginning or end of a word, = Cree *p*; between vowels or following *m*, closer to English *b*.

t - at the beginning or end of a word, = Cree *t*; between vowels or following *n*, closer to English *d*.

k - at the beginning or end of a word, = Cree *k*; between vowels or following *n*, closer to English *g*. See also *n* above.

c - at the beginning or end of a word, = Saulteaux *c*; between vowels or following *n*, closer to English *j*.

s - at the beginning or end of a word, = Cree *p*; between vowels, closer to English *z*.

š - at the beginning or end of a word, = English "sh"; between vowels, closer to "zh" as in the Russian name *Zhivago*, the initial sound in French *gendarme*, or in the middle of English *vision*.

m, *w*, *y*, are as in Cree and English.

Dakota, Lakhota, Nakoda⁶

The people designated by the names Dakota, Lakhota and Nakoda are distinct groups politically and culturally. However, all three of these groups speak closely related dialects of a single language which belongs to the Siouan family, as dissimilar from the Algonquian languages described above as any of them are from English or French.

The Dakota now in Saskatchewan came to Canada to avoid persecution following the "Minnesota massacre" of 1862, and have often been referred to as "Sioux." This is a shortened form of an Ojibwa word, recorded by the French as "nadouessioux," meaning "enemy, or snake."⁷ It is not difficult to see why a word with such derogatory connotations, from a completely different language family, is not popular with the Dakota who prefer their own name, meaning "ally." This same tribal name, in slightly different form, is also used by the Lakhota, a small group of whom entered Saskatchewan with Sitting Bull after the battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. Fewer still remained at Wood Mountain when Sitting Bull returned to the United States. The third group, the Nakoda, are indigenous to our province and were longtime allies of the Cree and Saulteaux. They have often been known by the name Assiniboine, from Ojibwa *ahsinipwân* for "one who cooks with (heated) stones," and thence also the name Stoney. Though this is less derogatory (since they were named by allies rather than enemies), their own name is still understandably preferred. It is again a dialectal variation on the same word for "ally." I have chosen to represent these three names — Dakota, Lakhota, and Nakoda — with three slightly different (commonly attested) spellings, to highlight differences in these dialects and the spelling systems used for them, in addition to the obvious difference between the initial sounds of "D," "L" and "N." This latter alternation (much like the Cree "Y," "N" and "TH" dialect difference) has long been cited as the primary diagnostic for differentiating these Siouan dialects. However, a more recent and careful dialect survey has shown that this feature alone is not sufficient for an accurate dialect classification (cf. Parks and DeMallie 1992).

6 The description of Dakota and Lakhota sounds are partially based on the description in Boas and Deloria (1941). Though this book is entitled *Dakota Grammar*, it is in fact describing Lakhota. The description of Nakoda has been facilitated by the excellent description in Schudel (1997).

7 See Siebert (1996) for a discussion of the exact derivation of this word in Ojibwa and Algonquian languages in general.

In general, very few official place names in Saskatchewan derive from Siouan origins and, given the similarity between these dialects, it is not always certain from which group a name has come. Of the few which do occur, Nakoda is the most common source for Siouan names, with fewer from Dakota and only a very small number of Lakhota forms. Because of this small number of names, and the fact that no single spelling system has currently gained general acceptance for use in writing any of the individual dialects, let alone all three, no detailed attempt will be made here to outline the complex sound system of each of the Siouan dialects. Only a brief statement of some of the outstanding features of the Siouan dialects must suffice.

The vowel systems of all three of the Siouan dialects are virtually identical. The basic vowels are:

a - as in English *father*.

e - as in English *bait*.

i - as in English *beat*.

o - as in English *boat*.

u - as in English *boot*.

As indicated, the first four vowels have qualities very similar to the four long vowels of Cree and Saulteaux, except they are not pronounced for a prolonged duration. The most outstanding feature of the vowel system, however, is the presence of "nasal" vowels, much like those found in French. Three of the basic "oral" vowels have nasal counterparts and, as with French spelling, this has commonly been indicated by writing the basic vowel with a following *n*.

an - as in French *blanc* "white."

in - as approximated in English *mean*, the vowel of which may sound nasal because it falls between two nasal consonants, "m" and "n." However, the "n" is not pronounced.

un - as approximated in English *moon*, as above.

Numerous optional conventions exist for representing these nasal vowels, and no agreement exists on the best system. Some of the options include the following "n" (*an*), a following "ñ" (*añ*), an overposed tilde (*ã*), or an underposed hook (*ḡ*). The latter symbol is a promising possibility, since it is commonly used by Siouanists outside of this province, and is also the convention adopted for writing nasal vowels in Saskatchewan Dene (see below).

Another outstanding feature of the Dakota and Lakhota dialects is a three-way contrast found for some of the consonants which can be very difficult for speakers of English to discern. This can best be explained by example:

p - as in English *spill*, "unaspirated" as in Cree.

p` - as in English *pill*, "aspirated" or with a puff of air following.

p' - with no English equivalent, though the attempt to make a popping sound with both lips will give an approximation of this sound. This is a "glottalized" consonant also known as an "ejective" or "explosive."

The differences between "aspirated" and "unaspirated" are very slight, and not normally recognized by English speakers, though they use both in daily speech. Hence, both sounds are often given the same spelling even though they are distinct. For instance, in the spelling of "Dakota," the "k" is aspirated (and hence, *k`*) but this has commonly been left unmarked in Dakota writing. In contrast, at least one spelling system in use for Lakhota marks aspirated consonants with a following "h" (e.g., "kh" equals *k`*). This is an acceptable solution, but can lead to confusion with English convention when an aspirated

"t" (or t̥) is written "th." "Glottalized" consonants, marked by an apostrophe ('), are pronounced as if they were exploding from the mouth and present similar problems of representation with no consensus on the best symbol to employ. Some systems have placed the apostrophe directly over the consonant rather than following it, or have utilized an overposed line (\bar{p}). The same three-way sequence illustrated above for *p* is present for *t*, *k*, and *c* (again with a "ch" sound). This consonant series has shifted somewhat in Nakota, such that the unaspirated consonants have changed to the more familiar voiced "b," "d" and "g" and, therefore, the basic "p," "t," and "k" can be used for the aspirated sounds without any additional mark, closer to the English spelling system. Thus, where Dakota and Lakhota have "t" for the unaspirated [t] sound, Nakota has a voiced [d]. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find all three names written with no more difference than the initial sound: Dakota, Lakota, Nakota.

Finally, a small number of additional sounds are present. As with Saulteaux, the Siouan dialects have a distinction between the following:

s - as in English *sell*.

š - as in English *shell*.

z - as in English *zoo*

\bar{z} - as in the Russian name *Zhivago*, the initial sound in French *gendarme*, or in the middle of English *vision*.

Each of these can also occur glottalized (i.e., *s'*, *š'*, *z'*, \bar{z}'), so that each sound has a very slight glottal catch before a following vowel.

Two additional sounds not familiar to most English speakers can be represented as follows:

\bar{h} - as in German *Bach*, or Scottish *loch*. (Often represented by "x" which is the standard symbol for this sound in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). "kh" could also be used, but not in the Lakhota system where a following "h" indicates aspiration).

\bar{g} - with no English or standard German equivalent, but rather like standard French [R]. It may be approximated by "voicing" the \bar{h} (or German "ch"), more like a "g" pronounced with friction, just as \bar{h} is made in the same place as [k]. "gh" is another optional spelling for this sound and [ɣ] is the IPA symbol. This sound is found in the name of the chief for whom the "Carry The Kettle" Reserve is named: *Cegak'ina*.

As with the *s* and *z* series above, \bar{h} and \bar{g} can also occur glottalized. A glottal stop can even stand as a separate consonant itself and occur alone preceding vowels, where it is often represented by the lone apostrophe ('). None of these dialects have an "r" sound, while "l" is also absent in all but Lakhota.

Dene⁸

Dene is the lone Athapaskan language spoken in Saskatchewan, as different again from the Siouan and Algonquian languages as these are from English or French. Dene has commonly been referred to as Chipewyan, but this is from a Cree word, *ciḡowayân*, meaning "pointed hide" used in description of traditional Dene dress. Coming as it does from the language of a people with whom the Dene were not always on good terms historically, its use is now considered derogatory by the Dene themselves, who use their

8 A chart of the phonemes or important sounds of the Dene sound system can be found in O'Grady and Dobrevolsky (1996: 380). The symbols utilized here are those in common use in the materials produced at SICC.

own name meaning "the people." The term Dene, or a very slight variant of it, is used by a large number of linguistically distinct Athapaskan groups. Thus, names like Chipewyan and Slavey still persist in linguistic literature solely to distinguish separate languages and cultural groups within the Athapaskan family as a whole, and such usage is not intended to offend Saskatchewan's northernmost First Nations, the Dene people.

The Dene language shares a number of features with the Siouan languages. The same basic symbols are used to represent the oral vowels of Dene, though the quality of each vowel is not identical to its Siouan counterparts, and there is an additional lax front or central vowel (f):

a - as in English *father*.

e - between the vowels in English *bit* and *bait*.

i - as in English *beat*.

o - between the vowels in English *book* and *boat*.

u - as in English *boot*.

f - between the vowels in English *about* and *bet*.

Additionally, all of these except *f* have nasal counterparts, as in the Siouan dialects or French. In at least one spelling convention which is finding increased popularity, these nasal vowels are represented by placing a small hook underneath the vowel.

a̱ - as in French *blanc* "white."

e̱ - as approximated in English *main* or *mint*, the vowel of which may sound nasal because it falls between two nasal consonants, "m" and "n".

i̱ - as approximated in English *mean*, as above.

o̱ - as approximated in English *moan*, as above, or as the vowel in *book*, but nasalized.

u̱ - as approximated in English *moon*, as above.

The three-way contrast of unaspirated, aspirated and glottalized consonants found in Siouan (e.g., *t*, *t'*, *t'*) also occurs in Dene, though the plain unaspirated [p] occurs without aspirated or glottalized counterparts. The unaspirated sounds tend to sound voiced, so that *b*, *d* and *g* are commonly used for the unaspirated consonants, unmarked *t* and *k* are used for the aspirated consonants, and *t'* and *k'* are used for the glottalized consonants. In this system, there is no "p" symbol in the Dene alphabet. However, Dene does have a large number of additional consonants, some unfamiliar to all other languages spoken in Saskatchewan, and many of these also come in the three-way contrast of unaspirated (voiced), aspirated and glottalized. For instance, both the sounds of English "ts" and "ch" occur as distinct sounds in this series as follows:

dʒ - as in English *buds*.

ts - as in English *cats*.

ts' - not occurring in English; just as *ts*, but with glottalization, as in the description of other glottalized consonants discussed above for the Siouan dialects.

j - as in English *judge*.

ch - as in English *church*.

ch' - not occurring in English; just as *ch*, but with glottalization, as in the description of other glottalized consonants discussed above for the Siouan dialects.

Some other more familiar sounds occur, such as the *s*, *ʃ*, *z*, *h* and *g* series (without *ẕ*) from the Siouan languages, though for Dene they are spelt as *s*, *sh*, *z*, *hh*, and *gh*

respectively. *m*, *n*, *r*, *w*, and *y* also occur with values consistent with those of English. Both of the English “th” sounds occur:

dh - as in English *then*.

th - as in English *thin*.

And there are two distinct “l”-sounds:

l - as in English *leaf*.

l̥ - produced in the same position as *l*, but with a strong breath as if attempting to whisper “l” and hiss an “h” together.

These last four sounds, combined with *d* and *t*, also occur in two further consonant series that English speakers find problematical. Again, the range of unaspirated (voiced), aspirated, and glottalized is attested:

ddh - pronouncing *d* and *dh* together.

tth - pronouncing *t* and *th* together.

tth' - pronouncing *t* and *th* together with glottalization.

dl - pronouncing *d* and *l* together.

t̥l̥ - pronouncing *t* and *l̥* together.

t̥l' - pronouncing *t* and *l̥* together with glottalization.

As in *Saulteaux* and the Siouan dialects, the glottal stop can also occur as a separate consonant, but in Dene it is commonly spelt with a dotless question mark (?) [publisher's note: the typesetting program used to produce *Prairie Forum* does not have this symbol], the official symbol of the IPA.

Finally, Dene is a “tone” language, meaning that the tone or pitch at which a word is spoken can have an affect on the meaning. In this respect it is similar to many of the languages of Eastern Asia, such as Mandarin, Cantonese and Thai, to name a few, or to numerous African languages, such as Ewe, Twi and Yoruba. There are two distinct tones in Dene, so only one needs to be marked in contrast to the other. Thus, high tone is marked with an acute accent (á) over the vowel, while low tone is unmarked.

There are exceedingly few official Saskatchewan place names that have been taken directly from Dene. This may in part be due to the later point in time of sustained contact between the Dene and Europeans, but it is certainly also a consequence of the difficulty that English speakers have with the complexity of sound in the Dene language and the problems it presents for an English-based spelling system.

Recording, Reconstruction, Restoration and Change

Despite attempts to give more accurate spellings of First Nations names, the “official” English names are still the ones that are most familiar to the majority of Saskatchewan's residents. These English spellings have had a number of different effects on the First Nations originals. In some cases, the spellings used are so obscure as to make it very difficult to recover the actual form of the original First Nations name. Even when translations are available to provide the necessary clues to a proper reconstruction, a poor original recording (compounded by odd choices of lettering) may still prove baffling.

A good example of a troublesome spelling is the name “Archithinue,” representing the Woods Cree word *ayahcithiniw* meaning “enemy, Blackfoot.” There is, in fact, no [r] sound in Woods Cree at all, let alone in this particular word. However, the word was recorded by a speaker of British English, where the [r] sound is usually not pronounced before consonants and in final position, despite its presence in spelling. Hence, the pronunciation of the Woods Cree word reminded the English recorder (quite possibly

Henry Kelsey himself, in this case) of a British pronunciation, and the word was accordingly given a British spelling.

The word *ayahcithiniw* provides yet another excellent example of how sound change in a language can render a spelling inaccurate. Even the English spelling “Archithinue” recognized the occurrence of a “th” sound (loud or voiced “th” as in “then,” not whispered or voiceless “th” as in “thin”) in the Woods Cree original. This sound is still present in Woods Cree (though no other Cree dialect), but for many speakers it has changed to [t] in most forms of the word *ithiniw* “person, First Nations person.” Hence the spellings *ithiniw* and *ayahcithiniw* are already somewhat out of date, for these words are now most commonly pronounced *itiniw* and *ayahcitiiniw* respectively.

Be that as it may, English may still hold the record for obscure spellings as attested by the many spelling rules and outright exceptions with which anyone learning to read the language must cope. As an example, the spelling of the English word “knight” was once not so far-fetched, since it was recorded when the word was pronounced [knɪxt]. This pronunciation was still current some 600 years ago, before the loss of [k] and [x] from this word and the change of [ɪ] (as in “bit” [bɪt]) to [i] (as in “beat” [bit]) and subsequent change to [aɪ]. After all of these changes in pronunciation, today our pronunciation of “knight” as [naɪt] is drastically different from that which appears to be indicated by our unchanged spelling.

Another interesting phenomenon that is commonly encountered has to do with the pronunciation of names based on the English spelling. Once an English spelling has been established, the original sounds that it was meant to represent are no longer an issue for others completely unfamiliar with the word or name. Instead, a variety of pronunciations may arise based on attempts to decipher the English spelling. Two excellent examples can be found in Wiwa Creek and Meskanaw. Both of these names are very close to the actual Cree spelling, but this has the reverse effect of distancing them from English sounds. The Cree original for Wiwa, *wiwa* “his wife,” might be more appropriately represented for English readers with a spelling like “Weewuh.” The spelling Wiwa, however, has led to the now current pronunciation of “Why-wuh,” which is no longer close to the Cree original. Similarly, the original for Meskanaw, *mēskanaw* “road, trail,” appears to have been too close to the Cree spelling, again causing a rather different English pronunciation. The original is closer to “May-skun-now,” while the current English pronunciation is more like “Mess-skun-nah” (with the final syllable pronounced to rhyme with “law” rather than the more accurate “now”). Finally, even where the sounds themselves are retained reasonably well, differences in stress patterns between English and First Nations languages can lead to somewhat odd pronunciations. A good example is found in Misinipe, north of La Ronge. The name is from *misi-nipiy* “big water.” In Cree and in the speech of those English speakers familiar with the Cree pronunciation, the main stress falls on the second syllable, so: [miss-SI-ni-pee]. For those unfamiliar with the original stress pattern, English habits usually lead to its pronunciation as [miss-si-NI-pee]. This is as odd to Cree ears as it would be for an English speaker to hear “radio” pronounced as [ray-DEE-o], with the stress on the second rather than the first syllable.

Most of these problems of spelling and pronunciation are to be expected when attempts are made to represent the sounds of one language with the symbols of another. With the descriptions provided in the guides above, and the existence of newly emerging (or well-established) SROs, it is hoped that First Nations names will be respected for their own origins and every attempt will be made to give these names, both old and new, spellings which accurately reflect the unique sound system of each of the languages in question. As mentioned, some English spellings have proven so obscure as to prevent a definite and accurate identification of the source word or name. When this occurs, regrettably, no accurate rendition is currently available. This is not to say that none is possible, and it is

hoped that those not so honoured here, or in Bill Barry's very thorough treatment in *People Places*, will one day also be properly restored and represented in their source language.

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