This book is dedicated to future generations.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................. v

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
1. The Cree ................................................................. 1
1.1 The Standard Roman Orthography............2
1.1.A Consonants ............................................................2
1.1.B Vowels ..................................................................3
1.1.C SRO: Chants .........................................................4
1.1.D Dictation ..............................................................5
1.1.E Minimal Pairs .....................................................6
1.2 Dialogue One ......................................................11
1.3 Introductory Information about Family ..........12
1.3.A Dialogue Two .....................................................13
1.3.B Dialogue Three ..................................................13
1.4 Numbers, Months, Dates .........................14
1.5 Chapter One Exercises ...................................16

CHAPTER TWO: NOUNS
2. Animacy .............................................................. 23
2.1 Number ..............................................................25
2.1.a Questions and Answers ............................33
2.2 Diminutives ........................................................47
2.3 Locatives .............................................................51
2.4 Chapter Two Review ...........................................55

CHAPTER THREE: PREPOSITIONS AND PRONOUNS
3. Location Words .............................................. 58
3.1 Prepositions .....................................................59
3.2 Pronouns ..........................................................63
3.2.A Demonstrative Pronouns ........................63
3.2.B Interrogative Pronouns ............................69
3.2.C Personal Pronouns ......................................73
3.2.D Emphatic Pronouns ..................................73
3.3 Dialogue Four ....................................................75
3.4 Chapter Three Review ..................................76

CHAPTER FOUR: ANIMATE INTRANSITIVE VERBS
4. Animate Intransitive Verbs ......................... 88
4.1 Imperatives .....................................................88
4.1.A 2 - Second Person Singular ....................90
4.1.B 2P - Second Person Plural .......................90
4.1.C 2l - The Imperative Inclusive ................90
4.1.D Conjugation Chart for Imperatives ..................91
4.1.E Delayed Imperatives ..................................91
4.2 Indicative Mood ............................................92
4.2.A Animate Intransitive Verb Patterns ............97
4.3 The VAI Indicative Mood
and Conjunct Mood ........................................ 100
4.3.A Indicative Third Person Subject ............101
4.3.B Indicative Third Person Obviative Subject ..................103
4.3.C Indicative First Person Subject ................104
4.3.D Indicative Second Person Subject ..........105
4.4 Chapter Four Review ...................................130
Acknowledgements

This book is a result of teaching introductory Cree via satellite, online course offerings, and in the classroom. It is an introductory course on the Cree language with basic grammar using topics that occur in everyday situations. It is primarily designed for those who have no easy access to fluent speakers, so the exercises and grammar explanations are geared for self-study. It has been my experience that those who successfully learn another language have been those who have devoted a lot of time in self-study.

I give thanks to the many students who have been in my classes using a form of this book throughout the years. Many thanks to my teacher and mentor, Jean Okimâsis, for her guidance throughout my teaching career. Without her encouragement I may have pursued another career. Thanks also to Arok Wolvengrey and Jean Okimâsis for proofreading this volume. Any mistakes can be attributed to myself. I often find my original dialect of Cree (TH-Cree) gets in the way of my working in the Y-Cree dialect. And, finally, I must give special thanks to my student Holly Lydia Martin who was more than enthusiastic to tackle the graphics in this book. And lastly, a great thank you to Donna Grant and Duncan Campbell for the excellent layout!

kinanâskomitinâwâw
I thank you all!

Solomon Ratt
November 2015
1. THE CREE

The Cree are the most widespread of Canada’s First Nations peoples. According to Statistics Canada figures of 1996 there are approximately 87,555 speakers of the Cree language in Canada. There are five main dialects of Cree spoken in Canada:

- The R dialect speakers, commonly known as “Atikamekw (Cree),” live in the south-western regions of Quebec;
- The L dialect speakers, known as “Moose Cree,” live on the western shores of James Bay, especially in Moose Factory, Ontario, hence the name;
- The N dialect speakers, known as the “Swampy Cree,” range from northern Ontario throughout the interior of Manitoba and mid-eastern part of Saskatchewan;
- The TH dialect speakers, known alternately as “Woods Cree” or “Rock Cree,” can be found in northern Manitoba and north-eastern Saskatchewan;
- The Y dialect speakers, known as the “Plains Cree,” range along the Great Plains regions of southern Saskatchewan as well as north-western Saskatchewan and northern Alberta.

Not all of these dialects of Cree are mutually intelligible although their grammar systems are basically the same. The R dialect is the one that is most radically different from the other four dialects; thus, it is the most difficult to understand by the other speakers of Cree. In Saskatchewan, speakers of the three dialects found here, the N, Y and TH, can communicate in Cree, but there are certain differences in word usages that sometimes need explanation. No dialect is better than any other. This introductory book will be done in the Y dialect.

Of the 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan there are 10 Saulteaux Nations, 7 Dene Nations, 8 Nakota/Dakota/Lakota Sioux Nations and 49 Cree Nations. Of the Cree Nations, 3 are TH-dialect, 3 are N-dialect, and the remaining 43 are Y-dialect. Although there appears to be a healthy number of Cree speakers in the parental age generations in some communities, most Cree communities fear the threat of language loss because the children are not learning the language.

Efforts are underway in many communities to revive the Cree language, with some communities establishing Cree immersion programs while others have core language programs. The programs use a number of methods including aural-oral language teaching and grammar-based programs, and most have introduced writing in what has been an oral language prior to the coming of the missionaries into Cree country. There are two basic writing systems: the syllabics system introduced to the Cree in the mid-nineteenth century and the Standard Roman Orthography (SRO). In this text we will work only with the SRO.
1.1 THE STANDARD ROMAN ORTHOGRAPHY

For this introductory text on Cree we will write Cree using the Standard Roman Orthography (SRO). What follows is a brief introduction on the SRO (for further information see: How to Spell It in Cree: The Standard Roman Orthography by Jean Okimâsis and Arok Wolvengrey: miywâsin ink, 2008). One advantage of using the SRO for writing Cree is its consistency: one letter represents one sound. In contrast to Cree SRO, English may have one sound represented by different letters or combination of letters as is evident in the following examples of the sound [ij]: Caesar (ae), each (ea), amoeba (oe), people (eo), meet (ee), me (e), machine (i), seize (ei), piece (ie), psychology (y). The same sound, [ij], is represented in Cree SRO as î.

1.1.A CONSONANTS

The Cree SRO has 10 consonants: c h k m n p s t w y. The consonants are pronounced similar to their English counterparts, for the most part, but the c, k, p, and t need special attention.

The “c” in Cree is pronounced like the “ch” in “charge”, or, depending on dialect, like the “ts” in “cats”. The following are some of the more common words in Cree with a “c”:

- cêskwa – wait
- miciso – eat (VAI)\(^1\)
- micisowinâhtik – a table (NI)

In English, the “k” can be silent, as in “know,” or it can be pronounced with a puff of air following it, as the “k” in “kipper”, or without the puff of air, as in “skipper”. The Cree “k” is pronounced like the “k” in “skipper” without the puff of air – except when following an “h”; then the “k” does have a softer sound. Some of the more common words in Cree with a “k” include the following:

- kiya – you
- kîsta – you too
- kiyawâw – you (plural)
- kistawâw – you (plural) too

In English, the “p” can be silent, as in “pneumonia”, or have an “f” sound when followed by an “h”, as in “phone”, or can have a puff of air as in “pot”, or have no puff of air as in “spot”. In Cree the “p” has no puff of air and is pronounced like the “p” in “spot” – except when following an “h”; then it has a softer sound. Some of the more common words in Cree with a “p” include the following:

- pêyak – one
- pêyakwâw – once
- pîsim – sun/month (NA)
- pisim – sun/month (NA)
- pisimwasinahikan – calendar (NI)

---

\(^1\) The following abbreviations are for the grammatical items here:

VAI – animate intransitive verb
VII – inanimate intransitive verb
NA – animate noun
NI – inanimate noun
In English, the “t” can have a puff of air, as the “t” in “tan”, or have no puff of air, as the “t” in “Stan”. The Cree “t” is pronounced with no puff of air, much like the “t” in “Stan”. Some of the more common words in Cree with a “t” include the following:

- tânisi – how/how are you
- tâniwê – where (use for NI)
- takwâkin – It is fall. (VII)
- tâniwâ – where (use for NA)

### 1.1.B VOWELS

In Cree we use seven vowel sounds to write in the SRO. We have three short vowel sounds: a, i, o; and four long vowels marked by either a circumflex or macron (bar) over the vowel: â, î, ô, and ê.

#### SHORT VOWELS

The short vowels include: a, i, and o:

- The short a: - pronounced like the first “a” in “appeal”:
  - apisîs – a little bit
  - api – sit (VAI)
  - awas – go away
  - awîna – who

- The short i: - pronounced like the “i” in “it”:
  - itôta – do it (VTI-1)
  - itwê – say (VAI)
  - itwaha – point to it (VTI-1)
  - isiyihkâsow – she/he is named (VAI)

- The short o: - pronounced like the “oo” in “shook”:
  - otin – take someone (VTA)
  - omisi – this way
  - otina – take it (VTI-1)
  - pipon – It is winter. (VII)

#### LONG VOWELS

The long vowels are marked with either a circumflex or a macron (bar) over the vowel: â, î, ô, and ê:

- The long â: - pronounced like the “a” in “fa” as in “do, ray, me, fa, so, la, ti, do”:
  - âstam – come here
  - âskaw – sometimes
  - âstamitê – over this way
  - âha – yes

- The long î: - pronounced like the “e” in “me”:
  - mîna – also
  - sîkwan – It is spring. (VII)
  - nîpin – It is summer. (VII)
  - wîpac – soon/early

---

1 VTI-1 – transitive inanimate verb-class 1
VTA – transitive animate verb
The long ô: - pronounced like the “o” in “or”:
ôta – here                 ôtê – over here
ahpô êtikwê – maybe        namôya – no/not

The long ê: - pronounced like the “ay” in “day”:
êkota – there               êkotê – over there
nêhiyaw – a Cree (NA)       nêhiyawê – speak Cree (VAI)

1.1.C SRO: CHANTS

CONSONANTS

c-c-c-c:           cêskwa, cêskwa, cêskwa pitamâ.
                  Wait, wait, wait a bit.

h-h-h-h:           hâw, hâw, hâw mâka.
                  Okay, okay, okay then.

k-k-k-k:           kâya, kâya, kâya itôta.
                  Don't, don't, don't do it!

m-m-m-m:           mahti, mahti, mahti nêhiyawêtân.
                  Please, please, please, let's speak Cree.

n-n-n-n:           namôya, namôya, namôya cêskwa.
                  No, no, not yet!

p-p-p-p:           pêtâ, pêtâ, pêtâ kimasinahikan.
                  Bring it, bring it, bring your book.

s-s-s-s:           sôhki, sôhki, sôhki-sêsâwî.
                  Hard, hard, exercise hard!

t-t-t-t:           tâpwê, tâpwê, tâpwê takahki.
                  Truly, truly, it is truly great!

w-w-w-w:           wîcih, wîcih, wîcih kiwîcêwâkan.
                  Help him, help her, help your companion.

y-y-y-y:           yîkatê-, yîkatê-, yîkatê-kwâskohti.
                  Aside, aside, jump aside!
VOWELS

a-a-a-a: apisis, apisis, apisis nehiyawêk.
A little, a little, speak (you – plural) a little Cree!

á-á-á-á: áskaw, áskaw, áskaw ákayásimo.
Sometimes, sometimes, sometimes speak English.

c-c-c-c: ékosi, ékosi, ékosi itôta.
That’s it, that’s it, do it like that.

i-i-i-i: itwaha, itwaha, itwaha iskwâhtém.
Point to it, point to it, point at the door.

í-í-í-í: íkatêna, íkatêna, íkatêna éwako.
Set it aside, set it aside, set that one aside.

o-o-o-o: omisi, omisi, omisi itwê.
This way, this way, say it this way.

ó-ó-ó-ó: óté, óté, óté pé-itohtê.
This way, this way, come this way.

1.1.D DICTATION

Write out the words the instructor says in the spaces below:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
1.1.e Minimal Pairs

Minimal pairs are two words with only one sound difference. Examples from English would include:

- pat – bat
- fit – sit
- fat – fit
- pot – pit

The difference in sounds can be in consonants or in vowels. Cree also has minimal pairs. Here are a few more common ones:

nahapi – Sit down! (VAI)

nahâpi – See clearly! (VAI)

atim – a dog (NA)

akim – Count him/her! (VTA)

ôma – this (PR-in)

ôta – here (PR)

asam – Feed him/her! (VTA)

asâm – a snowshoe (NA)

pisiw – a lynx (NA)

pésiw – Bring him/her! (VTA)

niya – me/I (PR)

niyâ – Lead/go ahead (IPC)

nîsta – me too (PR)

pasow – S/he smells it. (VAI)

Cree has many minimal pairs that appear in pronouns (PR) and in verb (V) pairs as the following illustrate:

- niya – me/I (PR)
- kîya – you (PR)
- nîsta – me too (PR)
- kîsta – you too (PR)
- nitisiyihkâson – I am named/called (my name is) (VAI-1st person singular)

Kitisiyihkâson – You are named/called (your name is) (VAI-2nd person singular)
nitohcin – I am from (VAI-1st person singular)
kitohcin – You are from (VAI-2nd person singular)

nititahtopiponân – I am of that age (VAI-1st person singular)
kititahtopiponân – You are of that age (VAI-2nd person singular)

In addition to minimal pairs, there are also minimal sets and near minimal pairs. The near minimal pairs can create some problems in spelling and understanding as shown in the following:

- acâhk – star (NA)  niyânan – five
- ahcahk – spirit (NA)  niyanân – us
- akik – mucous (NA)  ohciw – s/he is from (VAI-3rd person)
- âhkik – seal (NA)  ôcêw – a housefly

As is evident from the foregoing, we must be vigilant in writing the Cree words, if we want to write them correctly. Here are other minimal pairs which can cause problems:

- kisik – and also (IPC)  sâkinêw – S/he holds it out. (VTA)
- kisik – the sky (NI)  sakinêw – S/he holds onto it. (VTA)
- itapi – Sit that way! (VAI)  iskwêwasakay – a woman’s dress/coat (NI)
- itâpi – Look that way! (VAI)  iskwêwasakay – a woman’s skin (NA)
- takon – Carry him/her! (VTA)  atotêw – S/he makes a request of someone. (VTA)
- takon – Add it to it! (VTA)  âtotêw – S/he tells a story about someone. (VTA)
- pêhêw – S/he waits for s.o. (VTA)  kinosêw – a fish (NA)
- pihêw – a grouse/partridge (NA)  kinosiw – S/he is long. (VAI)
- ékâwiya – Don’t!  miskon – liver (NI)
- okâwiya – her/his mother  miskon – Feel him/her! (VTA)
- pâskisam – S/he shoots at it. (VTI-1)  pimisin – S/he lies down. (VAI)
- paskisam – S/he cuts it. (VTI-1)  pimisin – S/he lays sideways. (VAI)
- sêkîhêw – S/he scares s.o. (VTA)  pimotêw – S/he shoots arrows at s.o. (VTA)
- sâkîhêw – S/he loves s.o. (VTA)  pimohtêw – S/he walks. (VAI)
- itôta – Do it! (VTI-I)  pimiciwan – There is a current. (VII)
- itohtah – Take s.o. somewhere! (VTA)  pimiciwan – There is a cross-current. (VII)
- paskinam – S/he breaks s.t. off. (VTI)  otah – Defeat him/her! (VTA)
- pâskinam – S/he uncovers s.t. (VTI)  ôta – here (PR)
DO:

A. DICTATION: 10 WORDS IN CREE CHosen FROM THE PRECEDING VOCABULARy.

B. MARK THE LONG vowELS IN THE FOLLOWING WORDS:

- nahapi – See clearly!
- nahapi – Sit down!
- asam – Feed him/her.
- asam – a snowshoe
- maskisin – She/he is crippled.
- maskisin – a shoe
- maskosis – bear cub
- maskosis – small grass
- oma – this
- ota – here
- pasow – She/he smells it.
- pasow – She/he is dry.

C. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER: FIRST AND SECOND PERSONS

Go from student to student saying the following information to them, a section at a time. First do the name section with all the students, then move on to the next section. Once you have completed all the sections, then you can do all four sections with each of the students. Students do not get to see these until after the class.

1. NAME:

   SPEAKER A: ___________________ nitisiyihkâson. My name is ___________________.
   kiya mâka, tânisi kitisiyihkâson? How about you, what is your name?
   SPEAKER B: ___________________ nitisiyihkâson. My name is ___________________.

2. PLACE OF ORIGIN:

   SPEAKER A: ___________________ kayahtê nitohcin. I am originally from ___________________.
   kiya mâka, tânitê kayahtê kitohcin. How about you, where are you originally from?
   SPEAKER B: ___________________ kayahtê nitohcin. I am originally from ___________________.

3. PLACE OF PRESENT RESIDENCE:

   SPEAKER A: ___________________ mêkwâc niwikin. I now live in ___________________.
   kiya mâka, tânitê mêkwâc kiwikin? How about you, where do you live now?
   SPEAKER B: ___________________ mêkwâc niwikin. I now live in ___________________.

4. AGE:

   SPEAKER A: ___________________ nititahtopiponân. I am_____________________ years old.
   kiya mâka, tânititahtopiponêyan? How about you, how old are you?
   SPEAKER B: ___________________ nititahtopiponân. I am_____________________ years old.
D. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER: FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD PERSONS

Go from student to student saying the following information to them, a section at a time:

1. NAME: go to the first student in the circle with your information and your question:

   **SPEAKER A:** ________________ nitisiyihkáson. My name is ________________.

   kiya mäka, tânisi kitisiyihkáson? How about you, what is your name?

   **SPEAKER B:** ________________ nitisiyihkáson. My name is ________________.

   Go to the next student in the circle with your information and the information provided by the previous student then ask the question:

   **SPEAKER A:** ________________ nitisiyihkáson. My name is ________________.

   ________________ isiyihkáson w awa. (point to the previous student)

   **Speaker C:** nitisiyihkáson 

   kiya mäka, tânisi kitisiyihkáson? How about you, what is your name?

   **SPEAKER B:** ________________ nitisiyihkáson. My name is ________________.

   **SPEAKER A:** Point to the previous student then ask: tânisi isiyihkáson w awa? What is this one’s name?

   **SPEAKER C:** ________________ isiyihkáson w awa. This one’s name is ________________.

2. PLACE OF ORIGIN:

   **SPEAKER A:** ________________ kayahtê nitohcin. I am originally from ________________.

   kiya mäka, tâniti kayahtê kitohcin? How about you, where are you originally from?

   **SPEAKER B:** ________________ kayahtê nitohcin. I am originally from ________________.

   Go to the next student in the circle with your information and the information provided by the previous student then ask the question:

   **SPEAKER A:** ________________ kayahtê nitohcin. I am originally from ________________.

   ________________ kayahtê ohciw awa. (point to the previous student)

   **Speaker C:** ________________ kayahtê nitohcin. I am originally from ________________.

   **SPEAKER A:** Point to the previous student then ask: tâniti kayahtê ohciw awa? Where is this one originally from?

   **SPEAKER C:** ________________ kayahtê ohciw awa. This one is originally from ________________.
3. PLACE OF PRESENT RESIDENCE:

SPEAKER A: __________________ mèkwâc niwikin. I now live in ___________________.

kiya mâka, tânité mèkwâc kiwikin? How about you, where do you live now?

SPEAKER B: __________________ mèkwâc niwikin. I live in_______________________.

Go to the next student in the circle with your information and the information provided by the previous student then ask the question

SPEAKER A: __________________ mèkwâc niwikin. I now live in ___________________.

___________________ mèkwâc wikiw awa. (point to the previous student)

This one now lives in ___________________.

kiya mâka, tânité mèkwâc kiwikin? How about you, where do you live now?

SPEAKER C: __________________ mèkwâc niwikin. I now live in ___________________.

SPEAKER A: Point to the previous student then ask: tânité mèkwâc wikiw awa? Where does this one live now?

SPEAKER C:___________________ mèkwâc wikiw awa. This one now lives in_______________________.

4. AGE:

SPEAKER A: __________________ nititahtopiponân. I am __________________ years old.

kiya mâka, tânitahtopiponêyan? How about you, how old are you?

SPEAKER B: __________________ nititahtopiponân. I am __________________ years old.

Go to the next student in the circle with your information and the information provided by the previous student then ask the question

SPEAKER A: __________________ nititahtopiponân. I am______________________ years old.

___________________ itahtopiponêw awa. (point to the previous student)

This one is______________________ years old.

kiya mâka, tânitahtopiponêyan? How about you, how old are you?

SPEAKER C: __________________ nititahtopiponân. I am __________________ years old.

SPEAKER A: Point to the previous student then ask: tânitahtopiponêw awa? What is this one’s age?

SPEAKER C:___________________ itahtopiponêw awa. This one is______________________ years old.