

## LESSON 1

### SOUNDS IN SHESHATSHIU INNU-AIMUN

#### CONSONANTS

Spelling		Sound		Example	
<i>p</i>	(i)	[p]	- like English <b>p</b> , as in 'spot' (especially when word-initial or after a consonant) <sup>1</sup>	<i>pât</i> <i>pûshu</i>	perhaps s/he leaves
	(ii)	[b]	- like English <b>b</b> , as in 'tub' (especially between two vowels, i.e. in intervocalic position)	<i>uâpush</i>	rabbit
<i>t</i>	(i)	[t]	- like English <b>t</b> , as in 'stem'	<i>tâpue</i>	really, truly
	(ii)	[d]	- like English <b>d</b> , as in 'down' (especially between vowels)	<i>patetât</i>	five
<i>k</i>	(i)	[k]	- like English <b>k</b> , as in 'skip'	<i>kâkâtshu</i>	crow
	(ii)	[g]	- like English <b>g</b> , as in 'get' (especially between vowels)	<i>âkushu</i>	s/he is sick
<i>k<sup>u</sup></i>	(i)	[k <sup>w</sup> ]	- like English <b>qu</b> , as in 'quite'	<i>amishk<sup>u</sup></i> <i>kâk<sup>u</sup></i>	beaver porcupine
	(ii)	[g <sup>w</sup> ]	- as in 'Gwen'	<i>atîkuat</i>	caribou (pl)

<sup>1</sup> The description within round brackets refers to the distribution of the sound in Innu-aimun. The symbols within square brackets (e.g. [p], [b]) represent the actual phonetic values of the spelling, as per International Phonetic Association (IPA) transcription conventions.

<i>sh</i>	[ʃ]	- like English <b>sh</b> , as in 'ship' (this sound can occur on its own, and also before one of the stop consonants <b>p, t</b> or <b>k</b> ; before a stop, it is also heard as <b>s</b> )	<i>uâpush</i> <i>shâsh</i> <i>shîshîp</i> <i>nîsh<sup>u</sup></i> <i>mashk<sup>u</sup></i>	rabbit already duck three bear
<i>ss</i>	[s]	- like English <b>s</b> , as in 'sit'	<i>assî</i> <i>ishkuess</i>	earth, land girl
<i>tsh</i>	(i) [tʃ]	- like English <b>ch</b> , as in 'church'	<i>tshîsh<sup>teu</sup></i> <i>mî<sup>tsh</sup>ishu<sup>2</sup></i>	it is cooked s/he eats
	(ii) [ɟ]	- like English <b>j</b> , as in 'judge'	<i>mî<sup>tsh</sup>u</i>	s/he eats it
<i>m</i>	[m]	- as in English 'moose'	<i>mûsh</i> <i>mîsh<sup>tamîn</sup></i>	moose orange
<i>m<sup>u</sup></i>	[m]	- as in English 'gum' <sup>3</sup>	<i>atim<sup>u</sup></i>	dog
<i>n</i>	[n]	- as in English 'name'	<i>nîsh<sup>u</sup></i> <i>mî<sup>n</sup>ûsh</i>	two cat
<i>h</i>	[h]	- as in English 'ahead'	<i>ûhu</i>	owl

<sup>2</sup> See Footnote 6 below for clarification as to why intervocalic *tsh* in the word *mî<sup>tsh</sup>ishu* is pronounced [tʃ] rather than [ɟ], as in *mî<sup>tsh</sup>u*.

<sup>3</sup> The *u* in the sequence *m<sup>u</sup>* is not pronounced in word-final position, though it may affect the pronunciation of the preceding vowel, as in this case, where the *i* vowel is pronounced [ʊ]. It does, however, appear when further endings (e.g., the plural) are added. Lesson 3 provides more information on this. Note also that though raised *u* occurs after *sh* (*nîsh<sup>u</sup>* 'two') and *sh<sup>t</sup>* (*nîsh<sup>t<sup>u</sup></sup>* 'three'), these are exceptional, and consequently are not included in the list of consonants.

## VOWELS

(The ^ or circumflex accent over a vowel indicates that it is long.)

Spelling	Sound	Example
<i>e</i>	(i) [e]	– like the vowel in English 'say' (in an open syllable, that is, when the vowel is word-final, or else followed by a consonant plus a vowel) <i>nete</i> over there <i>tâpue</i> really, <i>mâtsheshu</i> truly fox
	(ii) [ɛ]	– like the vowel in English 'met' (in a closed syllable, typically a syllable ending in one or two consonants with no following vowel) <i>eshk<sup>u</sup></i> still, <i>ishkuess</i> again girl
<i>î</i>	[i]	– like the vowel in English 'bee' <i>shîpu</i> river <i>nîpit</i> my tooth <i>nîpît</i> in the water <i>mîna</i> berries <i>nîpîsha</i> tea (lit. 'leaves')
<i>i</i>	[i/ə/i]	– like the vowel in English 'bit', 'the', 'sofa' <i>nishk</i> goose <i>nîpî</i> water <i>amishk<sup>u</sup></i> beaver

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<i>â</i>	[a/æ]	– sound ranging from the <b>a</b> of 'fat' to the <b>a</b> of 'father'; before or after <b>u</b> , may be heard as a more back sound [ɑ] or [ɔ]	<i>tshiâshku</i> <i>pâshu</i>	gull s/he is dry
<i>a</i>	(i) [ə]	– like the vowel in English 'sofa' (in an unstressed syllable)	<i>namesh</i>	fish
	(ii) [ʌ]	– like the vowel in English 'but' or	<i>petamu</i>	s/he
	(iii) [a]	'pot' (in a stressed syllable)	<i>ukussa</i>	hears it her/his son
<i>û</i>	[o]	– varies between the 'o' of English 'tone' and the vowel of English 'June' or 'tool'	<i>kûn</i> <i>kûkûsh</i>	snow pig
<i>u</i>	(i) [ʊ]	– ranges from the vowel in English	<i>âkushu</i>	s/he is
	(ii) [o]	'put' to the vowel	<i>mashkushu</i>	sick
	(iii) [u]	sounds in English 'do' or 'tone'	<i>muku</i> <i>mîkushû</i>	grass, hay just, but s/he is red

The English sounds given here are only approximations. In particular, the Innu-aimun vowel sounds *e*, *î* and *û* do not have the off-glide that characterizes English tense vowels (e.g., 'say', 'boat'), but tend to be steady vowels, more like they would be in languages such as French or German.

Innu-aimun vowels noted as 'long' are not distinguished from 'short' vowels simply by phonetic quantity or length, but also by quality or timbre. Short vowels tend to be reduced (as are English unstressed vowels) to a neutral centralized [ə] as in 'the', while long vowels preserve their distinct quality. Among younger speakers, the short vowels *i* and *a* have almost completely fallen together, so that the first syllable of words like *nimish* and *namesh* are indistinguishable. The rounded vowels [û] and [u], while not always distinguished – for example, both are realized as [o] in a final open syllable – may be differentiated in word-initial position. Thus word-initial *û* is heard as [o], while word-initial *u* may be pronounced [wə], [wɔ] or [ʊ], depending on its historical origin.

Diphthongs, or combinations of two vowels, can also occur:

<i>eu</i>	[ew] <sup>4</sup>		<i>ishkueu</i>	woman
<i>au/âu</i>	[aw]	– cf. English 'loud'	<i>nuâpamâu</i>	I see him/her
<i>îu</i>	[yu]	– cf. English 'you'	<i>mîkushîu</i>	s/he is red
<i>ei</i>	[ey]	– cf. English 'day'	<i>utei</i>	his/her heart
<i>ai</i>	[ey]	– cf. English 'may'	<i>maikan</i>	wolf
<i>ui/uî</i>	[uy]	– cf. English 'phooey'	<i>apuî</i>	oar, paddle

### Examples of vowel oppositions<sup>5</sup>

*i* vs *a* (often not distinguished)

<i>nimish</i>	[nimɪʃ]	my older sister
<i>namesh</i>	[nəmeʃ]	fish
<i>amîshk<sup>u</sup></i>	[əməʃk <sup>w</sup> ]	beaver
<i>mashk<sup>u</sup></i>	[məʃk <sup>w</sup> ]	bear

*a* vs *u*

<i>ushkan</i>	[wəʃkən]	his/her bone
<i>ushkun</i>	[wəʃk <sup>w</sup> ən]	his/her liver

<sup>4</sup> This volume uses the symbol [w] to represent the *w*-like second element of a diphthong, though in IPA the symbol [ʊ] would be used. Similarly, [y] is used instead of IPA [i], as in [ey] rather than [ei].

<sup>5</sup> Not all of the pairs below are found on the recording, since some of these vowel contrasts appear to have been lost in the speech of younger community residents, among them our recorded speaker, Kanani Penashue. In general, when an Innu word or phrase is missing from the CD, this means that it was not possible to obtain from our speaker.

<i>i vs u</i>	<i>tâtinam<sup>u</sup></i>	[tadɪnɒm]	s/he touches it
	<i>tâtunam<sup>u</sup></i>	[tadonɒm]	s/he opens it
<i>a vs â</i>	<i>nitakushin</i>	[ntogɔʃən]	I arrive (see 1.ii below)
	<i>nitâkushin</i>	[ntagoʃən]	I am sick
<i>î vs i</i>	<i>ushkat</i>	[ʊʃgət]	at the beginning
	<i>ushkât</i>	[ʊʃgat]	his/her leg
<i>î vs i</i>	<i>tshimîn</i>	[tʃəmin]	you give it to me
	<i>tshimîn</i>	[tʃəmən]	you drink
	<i>tshîman</i>	[tʃimən]	match
<i>u vs û</i>	<i>tshînuâu</i>	[tʃən(ə)wɔw]	it is long
	<i>tshînuâu</i>	[tʃin(ə)wɔw]	you (pl)
<i>u vs û</i>	<i>ukussa</i>	[ʊgussa]	her/his son
	<i>ûkuma</i>	[oguma]	her/his grandmother

### SOME PHONOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SHESHATSHIU INNU-AIMUN

#### Processes affecting vowels

##### 1. Labialization

- (i) Short *i* and short *a* tend to be labialized by an immediately following *-ku* or *-k<sup>u</sup>* or *-m<sup>u</sup>* and pronounced *-uku*, *-uk<sup>u</sup>* or *-um*.

<i>mishtik<sup>u</sup></i>	stick, tree	pronounced [mɪʃtɔk <sup>w</sup> ]
<i>atim<sup>u</sup></i>	dog	pronounced [ətɪm]

- (ii) The vowel *u* may have an influence in labializing a front vowel of a preceding or following syllable. This process is often referred to as 'vowel harmony'.

<i>pipun</i>	winter	pronounced [pupun]
<i>takuan</i>	it is (in a place)	pronounced [tugwun]

- (iii) A word that begins with the vowel *u* and a labial consonant *m* or *p* may cause rounding of the vowel following this consonant. The initial *u* vowel may, alternatively, be copied to the next syllable. In either case, initial *u* may then be deleted.

<i>umashinaikan</i>	his/her book	pronounced [(u)muʃneygən]
<i>ume</i>	this	pronounced [(u)mwe]

## 2. Word-initial short vowel deletion

Short vowels in word-initial position directly followed by a consonant or consonant cluster tend to be deleted, as the following examples illustrate:

<i>akûp</i>	coat, jacket	pronounced [gop]
<i>ishkuess</i>	girl	pronounced [ʃkwes]
<i>ashtâu</i>	s/he puts it	pronounced [staw]

In addition, short *i* and *u* in the initial syllable of a word – and elsewhere – tend to undergo deletion between two consonants that are articulated in the same area of the mouth, that is, with identical or nearly identical points of articulation, as in:

<i>pimûteu</i>	s/he walks	pronounced [p̥motew]
<i>nitassî</i>	my land	pronounced [n̥tasi]
<i>mîshishuâkan</i>	table	pronounced [mitʃwan] <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The *tshsh* [tʃʃ] cluster that results reduces typically to [tʃ], which does not undergo voicing to [tʃ̥]. The loss of *ka* in the final syllable is explained in 3 on the following page.

## Processes affecting consonants

### 1. *sh/h* alternation

Among younger speakers, particularly, the sound noted *sh* [ʃ] tends to be pronounced as *h*, especially in intervocalic and word-final position:

<i>Sheshâtshît</i>	in/to/from Sheshatshiu	pronounced [ʃeʃaɕʒit] or [ʃehaɕʒit]
<i>shîshîp</i>	duck	pronounced [ʃiʃip] or [hihip]

### 2. Consonant cluster simplifications with *tshish*

- (i) An initial cluster *tsh + t* (which arises from the loss of short *i* or *a*) will undergo simplification to [st], as in :

*tshitatussen â?*      do you work?      pronounced [stâtussena]

- (ii) Clusters within a word will reduce to *ss* or *tsh* after the loss of a short vowel, as in:

<i>tshissenitam<sup>u</sup></i>	s/he knows it	pronounced [sɛndam]
<i>tshishennu</i>	elder	pronounced [tʃɛno]

- (iii) The cluster *tshn*, which results when a vowel is deleted in the sequence *tshin*, is regularly pronounced as *tn*:

<i>nîtschinân</i>	our (excl) house	pronounced [nitnan]
<i>uâtshinâkan</i>	juniper, tamarack tree	pronounced [watnagɔn]

### 3. Deletion of *ka* syllable

The syllable *-ka-* is typically not pronounced in nouns ending in *-âkan*, as in:

<i>tetapuâkan</i>	chair	pronounced [tetɔbwan]
<i>mîtskishuâkan</i>	table	pronounced [mitʃwan]