

**Key Terms and Concepts for
Exploring Nîhiyaw Tâpisiwin the Cree Worldview**

by

Art Napoleon

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Through a review of literature and a qualitative inquiry of Cree language practitioners and knowledge keepers, this study explores traditional concepts related to Cree worldview specifically through the lens of *nîhiyawîwin*, the Cree language. Avoiding standard dictionary approaches to translations, it provides inside views and perspectives to provide broader translations of key terms related to Cree values and principles, Cree philosophy, Cree cosmology, Cree spirituality, and Cree ceremonialism. It argues the importance of providing connotative, denotative, implied meanings and etymology of key terms to broaden the understanding of *nîhiyaw tâpisiwin* and the need for an encyclopaedic approach to understanding these key terms. It explores the interrelatedness of *nîhiyawîwin* with *nîhiyaw tâpisiwin* and the need to recognize them both as part of a Cree holistic paradigm.

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Mitoni kinanâskomitinâwâw kahkiyaw nitôtîmak.

A Nîhiyaw Way of Learning

To provide some context for the rest of this thesis, the following is an account of the lifestyle I grew up in which provided the framework for my nîhiyaw tâpisiwin, my Cree worldview. In this auto-ethnographic narrative I have provided translations of some nîhiyaw concepts in order to provide some insight into nîhiyaw thinking, values and customs. I have avoided citations and an academic tone to try and reflect my natural voice but I did make use of footnotes for pertinent information. Narratives are one of the nîhiyaw ways of attempting to deal with the complexities of culture that are not always easy to summarize. Where there's no food it's always good to start with a story.

Background

My Western name is Art Napoleon and my late mother was Irene Napoleon, a daughter of Fred Napoleon, a nîhiyaw-Dane-zaa mixed-blood, and Suzette Napoleon, a nîhiyawîwin-speaking Dane-zaa woman.¹ I was raised on my iskonikan meaning 'leftover land' (rejected by the government) and surrounding lands.² This iskonikan is legally registered as the East Moberly Indian Reserve aka Sauteau First Nation in the Peace Region of Northeastern BC. It is an inter-tribal community of nîhiyaw, Dane-zaa, Sauteau people and a few former Iroquois Métis who chose legal treaty

¹ In English Cree means the Cree people or the Cree language. In our own words, a Cree person is nîhiyaw (nîhiyawak is plural) and the language is nîhiyawîwin. In my community although many people have nîhiyaw, Dane-zaa, Sauteaux and even some Mohawk bloodlines, nîhiyawîwin was the first language since the 'reserve' was formed for it was still the primary language of trade and likely represented a form of economic and social power at that time. This speaks to the importance of language and its link to identity because my family, and many others with mixed bloodlines, saw themselves as nîhiyawak. From my own experience, the nîhiyawîwin language and culture formed my identity and shaped much of the thinking that makes me who I am today. It is a powerful connection that I believe can never be destroyed.

² Other nîhiyawîwin words for what the Canadian government calls 'Indian reserves' are tipâskân 'that which has been measured or surveyed' and askihkân 'substitute or mock land'. These terms obviously signify a dissatisfaction and resistance to being placed on unwanted lands, generally deemed remote or of no value to the colonial government. Although the reserve was the base of our home life we depended more on the traditional hunting and trapping areas surrounding the reserve. There is no way we would have been able to survive as nîhiyawak without access to our traditional lands, which today are overrun with cumulative industrial impacts.

status after being swindled of their scrip lands.³ Our ancestors were political holdouts and did not sign adhesion to treaty 8 until 1914 and were without a 'reserve' until 1915. Nîhiyawîwin was the primary language of the community until around the late 1970's when English use became more common.

When I was eight months old my mother died and I was left in the care of my grandparents. According to local custom, nimosôm 'my grandfather' and nohkom 'my grandmother' became my parents on that day and my aunts and uncles became my siblings. This meant that the community would forever recognize me not as an âpihtawkosisân meaning, 'half son' (refers to 'half-breeds') but as a child of my grandparents.⁴ This also meant that government officials never called my membership in the community or my 'Indian-status' into question so even the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) recognized the custom adoption. At the time there was no government assistance and it was customary for nîhiyaw grandparents to adopt grandchildren whose parents either died or were unable to rear children. I was one of three grandchildren raised primarily by nohkom, who had already raised her own and lost a few to miscarriage.

Due in part to mosôm's alcoholism, my grandparents divorced when I was eight years old. They lived apart and never spoke directly to each other again in this life; no lawyers or paperwork involved. Mosôm continued to hunt for us, as his

³ These Mohawk mixed bloods had their own settlement in Arras BC and at least one of the families had scrip land just outside of Dawson Creek which they somehow lost to local white farmers. This type of corruption was rampant at the time and many Métis people never got to live on the scrip lands they were awarded. Even though they became absorbed by nîhiyawak, many Mohawk surnames continue to exist in Northeastern BC and northern Alberta. One of these Mohawk 'half-breeds' was my great grandfather Napoleon Thomas, a descendant of Louis Karakwante aka Sun Traveler from Kahnawake.

⁴ My father is an Irish Canadian trapper, farmer and carpenter who I only saw rarely in my childhood. While we have a relationship today, in my youth I did not recognize him as my father.

traditional role as provider was deeply entrenched. This was his form of child support. Despite his personal struggles, mosôm worked hard all of his life at what was still largely a subsistence lifestyle. He was a mâcîwînow, an old-style hunter, going into the deep woods for days at a time to procure the moose meat that was our staple food. His main income was trapping throughout the winter, which was supplemented with summer labour and the raising of a small herd of cattle, all without mechanization or chemicals. He was also of mamahtâwisowin, someone 'bestowed with spiritual powers or a spirit guide'.⁵ My family knew that his helper was maskwa-acahk, the 'black bear spirit' as we all had to adhere to the rules and taboos around this particular spirit. For example, we could not bring any part of a bear anywhere near him without his knowledge or he would suddenly get ill. We could not walk behind him while he was eating or he would start choking on his food. We could not ever speak disrespectfully of the bear for we were taught that the bear spirit could hear this kind of talk. These were some of the many ways that family members, at a young age, became conscious of our cosmology and responsibilities to the spirit world. It is believed that my mosôm lost touch with his spirit connection as his alcoholism began to consume him. The drinking eventually took his life in 1981.

Despite the social issues and many faces of colonial oppression in my community, our traditional tribal values, customs and teachings were still very much alive. Once we got electricity in 1964, we enjoyed *Hockey Night in Canada* and

⁵ This is a brief translation of mamahtâwisowin but I will expand more on this complex concept in following chapters for it requires a deeper explanation and is one of the key words that helps to explain nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin.

some of the other comforts of rural Canadians but we were very much aware that we were not mainstream Canadians. We lived on the fringes of Canadian society. Underneath the façade of Canadianism we spoke our own language, lived our own lifestyle, had very different customs and remained intimately connected to the land. Our nîhiyaw tâpisiwin 'Cree way of seeing' and our nîhiyaw sihcikîwina 'Cree ways of doing things' were alive and this was very evident in our language. In nîhiyawîwin 'thunder' is not a noun but can only be properly described by the phrase piyisowak î kahkitowak which translates literally as 'the thunderbirds are calling out to one another'. In this example, the English worldview would typically consider this unrealistic or superstitious, but in the nîhiyaw worldview, thunder beings are considered to be very real and alive spirits. In our language animals, plants and many other organisms like trees and rocks are spoken of with animate terms the same way we speak of people. For example, 'maskwa niwâpimâw' is a two-word phrase with maskwa meaning 'bear' and niwâpimâw 'meaning I see him/her' clearly signifying the animate. By contrast, in English if a bear were to be shot by a hunter, a witness might ask, "Is *it* dead?" signifying the bear as inanimate.

These contrasts create cognitive dissonance and a clash of worlds. To survive in the public school system, we young speakers of nîhiyawîwin simply had to adapt to a new way of thinking. We did not realize at the time that this was a form of ethnocentric colonialism. Along with other aspects of colonization, including negative impacts to our land base, this introduced and imposed way of thinking slowly began to diminish our home lives, our language, our belief system and the fabric of our existence as nîhiyawak. It was only by continuing to practice our

culture and language so dedicatedly in our homes that my community was able to mitigate the impacts of modernization and hang onto the last remnants of a semi-nomadic way of life into the 1950s and a seasonal, land-based lifestyle right up until the late 1980s.

The Lifestyle

Kohkom was in charge of the homestead and winter stocking and our food was primarily from the land. As kids, we had to pitch in with berry-picking & canning, vegetable gardening, hide tanning, hauling wood for the akâwân 'smokehouse', preparing winter firewood, and care of the cattle and horses used for hunting and packing meat out of the woods. Our daily chores were extensive and the adults around us were always preparing for upcoming seasons and following the cycles of the land so there wasn't much leisure time. Even in between heavy work periods when there was some leisure time, the adults were always mending gear, tending livestock and maintaining the camp equipment.

In the spring there were the annual bear and beaver hunts, setting nets for migrating fish runs, spring medicine gathering, birch tapping, and the cutting, chopping & stacking of the aspen greenwood supply. In early summer there was mîstasowin, 'the scraping of inner cambium layer of young aspens' which was used as a tonic and killed the standing tree, which would dry and be ready as fuel for the smokehouse by the fall. In mid-summer there was snare-fishing, moose camps, various wild berry seasons and never-ending preparation of kahkîwak, the much

coveted 'drymeat' which once served as the base for pimihkân 'pemmican' and was an important food source in the building of colonial Canada.⁶

In late summer there was the prime bull season where mistahay-yâpiw, the fat 'king bull moose' were sought for lard & grease making. There were moose-berry, chokecherry & blueberry seasons, and grouse hunting season. In the fall there was waterfowl season, medicinal root gathering,⁷ the hauling & stacking of seasoned firewood, the hay & garden harvests, lake trout netting time, preparing the horses for the pasture where they would free range and forage for the winter, and all other winter preparations.

In winter the most important activity was nôcihcikîwin 'trapping' and most families ran a trap line with an outpost cabin where trappers would stay for weeks. In the generation before mine, men would stay on the trap lines for months at a time. Back at our main homes it was a time for children to learn to snare rabbits and prepare furs. Some children would have their own mini-trap lines to maintain throughout the winter and they would learn to prepare and sell their own pelts and get a taste of earning their own spending money. Winter was also the time for kohkom's sewing and beading where girls would learn to make quilts, moccasins and other clothing while all of the kids were groomed on community historical narratives and âtayohkîwina, the sacred stories and legends told mostly in winter.

⁶ Pemmican is the bastardized form of pimihkân along with words like saskatoon, muskeg, toboggan, moccasin and many other misspelled nîhiyawîwin words in Canadian English dictionaries. There are also hundreds of nîhiyawîwin place-names throughout Canada.

⁷ In my childhood medicinal plant knowledge was already becoming less practiced and we sometimes relied on nîhiyawak plant healers from nearby communities. One of our main medicines known as 'muskrat root' had all but disappeared due to land expropriation and we were forced to trade for it with our Alberta cousins.

Through the âtayohkîwina we learned more about our cosmologies, key sacred figures and key spiritual principles meant to carry us through life.

Traditional Education

The idea of a moose-camp, much like the concept of a hunter-gatherer, is a misnomer. People living the land-based lifestyle did more than randomly follow game and pluck berries; many were experts at their own style of low-impact land and wildlife stewardship. Hunters had to know their game intimately: all of the animal habits and patterns and what signs to watch for at different times of the year. They had to get into the thinking of the animal they were pursuing and try to outwit or otherwise engage with it. A good tracker could see game footprints through grass that are not visible to anyone else. Like forensic work, they could find a moose hair in a tangle of willows or a broken twig to tell the direction and time of travel. They could read a track to determine the age, sex, size and speed an animal was moving. Disrespectful or wasteful hunters were known to have bad luck hunting. A good hunter was in tune with and respectful of the animal he was after and sometimes the animal would be known to take pity and offer itself to a hunter. This concept is known as mîkawisowin 'a gifting or giving'.⁸ When I was a child there were hunters who were so tuned in they could dream the animal they were hunting and know exactly where to find them. This is also a form of mîkawisowin.

In September just before the moose-rutting season, it is always known to rain. People in my community understood this autumn rain to be caused by the Bull

⁸ There is no English equivalent of this spiritual concept of an animal voluntarily offering its life and there are many land-based and spirit-based nîhiyawîwin terms not directly translatable into English.

Moose in order to help them loosen the summer velvet from their antlers and prepare for battle. We understand the phrase *î kimowanikhîtwâw* 'they are rainmaking' to apply specifically to moose at that time of year. Common English thinking cannot grasp the concept of animals having the power to make it rain and it would typically be dismissed as coincidence or worse, superstition. But much of these *nîhiyaw kiskihtamowina* 'Cree knowledges' (yes knowledge is pluralized in *nîhiyawîwin* when referring to more than one type of knowledge) stem from dreams and stories that have been handed down countless generations and based on very intimate relationships with land and animals.

Moose-camps were family excursions into the backcountry at a time when there were few roads and the pack trail networks were still intact. A large base camp was set up with several smoking racks and as game was hauled to base camp, the women and children processed the goods into drymeat, hides, ropes and even tools. The men would split up and head out to track and stalk game and return with fresh kills. As kids we were expected to help with everything and observe and absorb as much as possible. These concepts are known as *nâkatohkîwin* 'paying absolute attention with all of our senses and intuitions' and *ahkamîmowin* 'a rapid focused use of the mind'.⁹ These were well-known mantras in my childhood learning and every child was trained to keep their eyes peeled not just for danger or for spotting game and other gifts of the land but to also develop intuition and watch for spiritual signs through a concept known as *môsihtâwin*, 'becoming suddenly aware

⁹ *Nâkatohkîwin* is yet another concept that had no direct English equivalent. It is recognition of the importance of intuition and the spiritual side to our minds that is always present. This concept represents more than listening with the ears but listening also with our minds, heart and spirit.

of something with the use of all senses' (in some ways similar to a gut-feeling in English).¹⁰ The kids would learn all of the skills involved in maintaining a camp while learning about horse care, plant life, survival, tracking, hunting small game, fishing and berry picking. There were multiple activities and opportunities to learn and most activities were supported with related stories and teachings to enable a deeper understanding of each activity. By learning to take proper care of meat, using every part of an animal, showing gratitude and sharing the meat with community members that had no hunters, we were learning about respect and relatedness. Teachings were centered on our values and our *nîhiyaw tâpisiwin* and every activity was set within a larger context.

At the camps or in the family smokehouse, the stories seemed never ending. There were hunting stories, historic narratives and valuable family memories about the animals and lands of our peoples. All of these stories were told in *nîhiyawîwin* and when I heard some of these stories retold in English, they just did not have the same impact, as much meaning was lost in translation. Listening to fantastic adventures spoken in *nîhiyawîwin* around an evening campfire over a cup of *maskîkowâpoy* 'muskeg tea' is one of my favorite childhood memories and there were many nights I was transported into other worlds while laying on the ground staring at the stars. We were taught informally through these stories about our values, laws, gender roles, responsibilities and place in the world.

Our identities as young *nîhiyawak* were being formed not just through these stories but also through *nîhiyawîwin*. The language itself was a doorway into a way

¹⁰ This term has multiple related meanings ranging from a sensing of an emotion to a vibe or awareness of visible and invisible presences. There is no direct single word English equivalent.

of seeing the world and all of its objects, entities and life forms. In living off the land, there was a season for everything and within those seasons there were more sub-seasons. Every season related directly to the next so everything was inter-dependant and intertwined. There was also a reason for everything and a primal, built-in recognition that we humans were not alone in this world; that there were unseen forces all around us that we were taught to acknowledge and even engage in a relationship of reciprocity with, either directly or indirectly. In this way everything in our world was inter-connected as one thriving web of life. As such, learning was not seen as separate from our way of life but as part of the greater whole. Work was not seen as work but simply as a part of daily life with everyone having a role. Spiritual practices were not seen as isolated or relegated just to specific times but as imbued fully in one's life, everyday, all day long. There were strict rules and practices we lived by and the stories, language and lifestyle reinforced these unwritten laws.

Through our chores, we were learning survival and life-skills by observing and then trying tasks out. It was a hands-on approach to learning and the lessons simply never ended when our childhoods did. Learning was very relational and whether it was an aunt, uncle or another community elder, there were a variety of mentors available to youth and young adults. In our kinship system most elders were referred to as grandparents whether they were related by blood or not. In my early childhood all adults referred to each other by kinship terms, not by given names. In fact, it was considered rude to address someone by his or her name. If people were not related by blood it must be determined what kinship role they

would have with each other. Today this custom is only practiced by a few remaining elders.

Most adults in the community were generalists in their nîhiyaw knowledge but many were known to specialize in certain life skills. As such, there were tracking mentors, animal behavior mentors, drum-making mentors, equestrian mentors, hide-tanning mentors, even mentors for more modern skills like canning and sewing with machines. If a child showed natural gifts and interests in a specific area, the elders sometimes nurtured and encouraged this development. This built the child's confidence and helped them to further form their identity. The kihtiyâyak 'elders' were particularly fond of youth who exhibited the qualities of kakayiwâtisowin, a concept that describes an 'eagerness that is always ready for action and service; a willingness to help without being asked to'.¹¹ In my family, all of my uncles mentored me in hunting and bush life and they were not always gentle but in any potentially dangerous situations I was glad to know that, because of their survival skills, they were the ones who had my back. Before my generation some youth might even get selected as oskâpîwak or 'ceremonial apprentices'. This tradition was largely put to rest during my childhood but we later brought it back to my community through the help of paskwâwînowak, our prairie relatives.¹² In the extended family, all adults had input on the raising and training of youth, it was not

¹¹ Kakayiwâtisowin is another hard to translate nîhiyaw concept that requires a full English explanation.

¹² Many nîhiyaw ceremonies that were put to rest in my territory due to missionary influence, continued to be practiced underground in the prairies where they eventually re-emerged. While we nîhiyawak of the sakâw 'woodland or forest' lifestyle maintained our ability to live off the land because of our access to game, our paskwâw 'prairie' relatives maintained more of the old ceremonies. For this reason I did not take on a formal role as an oskâpîw until I was in my thirties.

just up to the parents and grandparents. At the same time, it was clearly understood that children will arrive at their own big picture understanding of the world and their relationship to all things in due time.

Aside from the tough love and the inevitable harsh realities of growing up around alcoholism and intergenerational trauma, my childhood during the last days of a subsistence lifestyle in the boreal foothills and forests of Northeastern BC, were filled with adventure and lessons that still guide me to this day. At the time I did not know that this was a holistic way of life because it was completely normalized. Had my younger mind understood more, I don't think I would have taken the lifestyle for granted.

The subsistence way of life where we followed the seasonal rounds and cycles of the land lasted right until the 1980s when key elders began to die off or got too old to be active on the land. Somehow, it co-existed with the modernism that slowly crept into our once isolated community. In my youth, our extended family structure and oral traditions were still in place. This allowed us to be relatively independent and self-sufficient. It also allowed me a glimpse into the older traditional nîhiyaw (and Dane-zaa to a lesser degree) way of life¹³. I'm certain that my grandparent's resolve to speak nîhiyawîwin and live their lives as nîhiyawak had a lot to do with allowing me to have this glimpse.

¹³ Dane-zaa are also known as Beaver in historic writings. Despite the pride in our Dane-zaa blood, my grandparents spoke nîhiyawîwin along with the rest of the community. This is the language we spoke and therefore, it is the language that shaped our worldview. We were also exposed to some Dane-zaa history and teachings but it was through the lens of nîhiyawîwin. We maintained the ties to our Dane-zaa relatives but only kohkom could converse in Dane-zaa, which is a Dene language from the Athapaskan linguistic family and not at all related to nîhiyawîwin. These languages are about as related as Chinese is with German.

Formal Schooling

Even though my grandparents were not formally educated and spoke almost no English (mosôm spoke some broken English), they saw the value of a formal education in the face of rapidly changing times and supported all of the younger children to attend school. The older adults were trained on the land and did not have to go to school after the first few grades. With nîhiyawîwin as my first language, my older siblings taught me to speak English before I first went to a provincial day school just four miles from my reserve. The teachers were always fresh from England and most were generally supportive and took an active interest in their students and in the surrounding community. As kids, we didn't feel like outsiders. With the small school situated between two reserves and consisting of 90% Native students, there was still a sense of safety and familiarity.

Grade five, when we started getting shipped to the town school, was a different story. There, I had a teacher who was openly racist toward Native people. I had never been treated with such open disdain before and it eroded my self-esteem. This was the year I came closest to being held back a grade. This was the first time I began to question my identity as a Native person. I began to feel the pressure to become like everyone else in order to fit in; that it was wrong to be Cree or Dane-zaa. I lost interest in school subjects and began to rebel. Luckily, I was rooted in a home where language and culture were steadfastly reinforced. Older family members would chide the youth if any of us were to speak English to an elder or show any sense of shame in our 'Indianness'. Also, by the time I reached junior high I

discovered how to make people laugh and learned to enjoy sports. Academically, it was the reading and writing along with my social need to belong that got me through when all my old classmates from the reserves were dropping out. They lost interest and felt out of place so many left schools as soon as they were old enough to join the workforce.

When I was in Junior High School it was not uncommon to experience blatant racism from individuals but our minds were too young to recognize that the school system itself represented a form of institutionalized racism, designed specifically for the status quo and their mōniyâw 'White or Western' ways of seeing the world. This system failed most of these 'drop-outs' because many of them were highly skilled in areas I could never be. These 'drop-outs' were intelligent in ways the school system simply was not able to recognize because schools were focused on prescribed formulas and not on individuals. The practical, hands-on, holistic, relational, integrated and non-regimented ways of learning we grew up with were largely replaced with the rigid, narrow, authoritarian, impersonal, abstract, inflexible, and hierarchical structures of the public school system. Our holistic ways of seeing the world and knowing our place in it, our tâpisiwin and our language began to get marginalized.

The Community Now

Today, while my community appears materially better off, it reflects only a shadow of its former cultural richness. Children, youth and young families do not speak nîhiyawîwin. The most knowledgeable traditional elders like my

grandparents and many other elders who lived off the land are now gone from the earth. Generally only people in their fifties are likely to be considered to be fluent while a handful in their forties are semi-fluent. Most of our population does not speak or understand the language. For most, gone with the language are the stories, ceremonies and teachings that bound it all together and provided a sense of community, history and belonging. The strong connection to the land and spirit realm has been weakened. In the new era of mass media and global economics, English has become the language of power not just in Canada but also throughout the world. Therefore, *môniyâw mâmitonihcikanîwin* 'Western or White thinking' as the elders call it, has become very dominant not just in my community but in most *nîhiyaw* communities. This is still the common sentiment among our few remaining fluent elders.¹⁴ We are in danger not only of losing our language but also, in the filtering of *nîhiyawîwin* through *môniyâw mâmitonihcikanîwin*, we are in danger of losing the accurate translations and full meanings of our words and concepts. Today modern linguists and other professionals are recognizing what our own language practitioners, elders and speakers have always known: that language and worldview are inextricably linked and that language is the doorway to the soul of a culture. If language and worldview are in fact interrelated, then the eroding of a language is also the eroding of a culture. Those of us who are fluent or semi-fluent *and* have a

¹⁴ This is also my sentiment but I will make a personal disclosure here in acknowledging my own failure to pass the language onto my children, some of whom are now adults. They have all been exposed to it as children but are far from being able to use it for any practical purposes. *Nîhiyawîwin* is a language best learned in a *nîhiyaw* context and an environment and lifestyle that nurtures it. I do my best to expose my younger daughters to *nîhiyaw* teachings, stories, ceremonies and a land-based lifestyle where they learn to respect all life but I know that a better grasp of the language would deepen their understanding. My challenge is to explore ways of making *nîhiyawîwin* practical for them even in an out-of-territory urban setting away from the extended family.

comfortable familiarity with the old teachings might be able to remember ceremonial terms, hunting terms, land-use terms or other words that are falling out of use but younger generations may not. We speakers who still believe in the teachings from our childhoods might be able to recognize mistranslations and the filtering of nîhiyawîwin through English lenses but new language learners might not be able to decipher and verify words for accuracy. In the age of mass communication, this could result in a rapid spread of misinformation. New learners may never have the same opportunities to experience the magical nîhiyaw world that some of us were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of.

CHAPTER ONE: Mâcihtâwin (Introduction)

Background on Nîhiyawîwin

The Cree language family is easily the most widespread in Canada, physically covering a vast expanse of the country from the Maritimes to BC's Northern Rockies. Nêhiyawîwin or 'Plains Cree' is spoken throughout much of Alberta and most of Saskatchewan. A sub-dialect of Plains Cree, written as nîhiyawîwin 'Northern Plains Cree', is spoken in the boreal regions of northern Alberta, Saskatchewan and parts of Northeastern BC.¹⁵ Plains dialects are also spoken in parts of Montana State and in the NWT. The Woodland dialect covers most of northern Saskatchewan where it commonly overlaps with the Plains dialect. The Muskego or Swampy dialect covers much of northern Manitoba, a small part of eastern Saskatchewan, and extends into Northern Ontario. Boundaries have never been formally (or at least firmly) established between western dialects and because of intermarriage and other factors there are a few communities where more than one Cree dialect is routinely spoken. East Cree dialects such as the ones found in James Bay and languages further east are more difficult for Western Cree speakers to understand.

¹⁵ Speakers of the Plains and Northern dialects, classified by linguists as the 'Y' dialect, can converse with one another easily. The level of understandability between Plains and Northern Plains Cree can be likened to the same regional differences between English speakers in rural Saskatchewan and urban Vancouver English speakers. The northern sub-dialect is also called Northern Cree. Northern Cree speakers live a woodland lifestyle and are sometimes called sakâwînowak 'woodland/forest people' but this is only a cultural descriptor, not the linguistic designation used for the Woodland 'TH' dialect further east.

Complexities of Writing in Nîhiyawîwin

My own level of nîhiyawîwin fluency can be described as conversational. Although nîhiyawîwin was the first language I heard, my older siblings taught me English at an early age. I am aware of my slight novice accent and sometimes get lost following the speech of advanced speakers but I can converse quite freely and often think in nîhiyawîwin.

When speaking in English I am not used to having to describe every single detail about a subject because this is generally not done in nîhiyawîwin speech. After all, people are supposed to follow the innuendos, implied meanings and general tone and intent of speech. People are supposed to read body language, facial expressions and be able to use a variety of senses. When people are in synch, they fill in the blanks and empty spaces or just leave them for another day. This could all be just bad communication but more likely, they are partial reflections of the nîhiyaw communication patterns I was raised in. These patterns can also extend to writing. Using English writing to convey nîhiyaw concepts is not a simple task.

Using standardized roman orthography (SRO), Plains Cree proper is spelled nêhiyawîwin but it is spelled as nîhiyawîwin in the northern sub-dialect.¹⁶ Notice the subtle difference. Throughout the majority of this thesis, I use my northern dialect written version 'nîhiyawîwin' to describe or refer to Plains Cree language as

¹⁶ Using standard roman orthography (SRO), Plains Cree writing has become standardized over recent decades. Based on this writing system there are very few differences between Plains Cree and Northern Cree dialects. For the purpose of this thesis the main difference for readers to know is that Northern Cree does not use the letter 'e'. Instead it uses the 'î' symbol, which produces a slightly different sound to that vowel. This explains why Plains writers spell the language nêhiyawîwin or nehiyawîwin and Northern Cree writers spell it nîhiyawîwin. Throughout this thesis, I will use the Northern version nîhiyawîwin except when I am quoting someone using another dialect.

a whole, since it is the dialect I was born into and it's a dialect that is underrepresented in academic circles. When I refer to Eastern dialects I will generally use the word Cree or whatever term the people use to describe themselves. The other thing to remember about nîhiyawîwin writing using SRO is that we do not use capital letters. For the sake of aesthetics and formatting I am compromising and allowing the use of capital letters on nîhiyawîwin words when:

- They are at the start of a sentence
- They are used in a heading or subheading

I believe that this should also make for easier readability since many nîhiyawîwin terms are long and can look similar to new readers. Also, since English has been so domineering and used by colonial governments to help diminish the use of nîhiyawîwin, I have decided to not italicize or treat nîhiyawîwin terms as secondary entries and have instead placed the English translations within 'single brackets' after each introduced nîhiyawîwin word.

The word nîhiyawîwin itself is a concept I struggled with using in written format. While I use it in this thesis to mean the Cree language or the language of the nîhiyaw people, it has broader connotations. The term nîhiyawîwin can also mean nîhiyaw culture or 'nîhiyaw-ness' for lack of a better term. This stems from a nîhiyaw paradigm where the interconnection between language and culture is prevalent and immediate. In our nîhiyaw way of thinking there is no separation between language and culture. Therefore, when writing out the term I had to separate it in my mind and remember that I was using it to refer to the language and not the culture. This is not something that comes naturally for me. I doubt that it's

something that comes naturally for anyone who was raised with nîhiyawîwin as a first language. Subsequent chapters will explore holistic concepts further.

In this thesis, with such a big emphasis on nîhiyawîwin terms and their meanings, I am essentially writing across cultures and inviting readers on a cross-cultural journey. It is a given that anyone interested in understanding nîhiyawîwin language would be willing to put extra effort into following the use of the many terms introduced so sections of the thesis may not be suited to a passive reading style. Since many nîhiyawîwin terms may be difficult to read (remember many words are long and look the same to the uninitiated eye), a glossary of terms with English translations is provided as an appendix.

Terms and Concepts as Mirrors

Our opening story not only described my childhood in a nîhiyaw community but also provided a backdrop to introduce some nîhiyaw values, concepts, customs, and beliefs that stem from nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. Some of these concepts are like little mirrors that reveal glimpses back to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. The story provides a context so that concepts can be understood more easily. The nîhiyaw concepts of mamahtâwisowin, nâkatohkîwin, môsihtâwin, and kakayiwâtisowin are briefly explained along with descriptions of animacy, values, and connection to land, animals and the spirit world. This thesis is all about nîhiyaw worldview through the lens of the language. The terms, therefore, play a central role.

Generations of people in my community were shaped by our traditional way of seeing the world *and* through our language. Even though many fluent speakers

have learned to adapt to western cognitive frameworks, many of us are shaped and guided by our nîhiyaw ways of thinking and being. As nîhiyawak, we generally have our own ways of learning, of acquiring and processing information.

In my youth, the role of the nearby public schools we attended was to mold us to suit the system and to undermine our belief systems, albeit with a more subtle tone than residential schools. The majority of the public system seemed based on abstract concepts, individualism, compartmentalization and fragmented views and information. It is no wonder that many from my community struggled to fit into the education system. In retrospect there was nothing 'wrong' with us as we were led to believe but rather it was the public system that failed us through its ethnocentric and colonial approaches and inability to accommodate a nîhiyaw worldview and related pedagogical approaches.

In this thesis it is evident that, as nîhiyawak, we have our own outlooks and beliefs on life. Moreover, nîhiyawîwin routinely requires speakers to specify certain types of information and forces speakers to be attentive to certain details that may be overlooked or may just not be as important to a speaker of another language. If nîhiyawîwin requires speakers to think about animals, trees and rocks as living beings and to always be aware of spirits, don't the speakers become acculturated to these processes? If one is raised to see the entire world in a holistic way with very little frame of reference for western abstract concepts, doesn't this impact the ways they learn and receive information? Since speech habits are cultivated from the earliest age, I would argue that speakers develop habits that affect all of their experiences, perceptions, feelings, memories and place in the world. Nîhiyawîwin

terms are indicators of this reality. While my research may not be able to answer how nîhiyawîwin specifically shapes our cognitive functions, I can state from my own experience, that the language and worldview together shapes my thinking in that I have been a right-brain oriented, holistic thinker my whole life. I see the big picture before I see details. I must have a context and be able to see how smaller things fit into the bigger picture. I must see the direct relevance of any task and understand concepts by seeing them visually or experiencing them directly.

Supporting, at least partially, the theories of linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism, many nîhiyaw concepts are inexpressible in English.¹⁷ If anything, neo-relativists like Deutscher (2010) argue concepts that nîhiyaw elders and nîhiyaw society as a whole have always known – that our language is intertwined with our thinking and impacts our beliefs, values and views of the world. Mary Young (2003) asserts that the language and worldview cannot be separated, “I agree that the world view of Aboriginal languages is different from that of European peoples, but I disagree that the languages are products of a world view. I believe the world view is imbedded in the languages.” (p.104). Speaking from a Nishnaabeg perspective, Simpson (2011) describes the imbedded nature of language, “Rather, there is a set of processes, values, and philosophies imbedded in our language and culture that one needs to embrace in order to live as Nishnaabeg.” (p.53). Elders, knowledge-keepers, nîhiyaw scholars and language practitioners right across the country commonly express similar views. Based on the upbringing

¹⁷ Linguistic determinism and relativism are theories based on the idea that languages shape thought processes. Early theorists argued that language limited cognitive abilities. Newer theories debunk the limited cognitive argument but still theorize that languages impact our concepts of the world and aspects of our cognitive functioning.

in my nîhiyawîwin speaking community and according to almost every nîhiyaw elder I have learned from, one cannot gain deep insight into the nîhiyaw belief and value system without having some basic knowledge and understanding of the language.

I do not believe one has to be fluent in order to understand the nîhiyaw teachings, laws, philosophies, values and ceremonies. However, one who benefits personally from these teachings or otherwise understands the nîhiyaw ways can see how these teachings are strongly linked to the language. They recognize the importance of nîhiyawîwin and understand how terms and concepts can help them in learning and practicing the nîhiyaw ways and the nîhiyaw ceremonies. Latent speaker Leslie Skinner describes his connection to nîhiyawîwin:

The Cree language is the framework within which I think. I believe there are elements of the language that I've always known, even before learning it. As a child I remember the good feeling I got from the language, from hearing anyone speak it and trying it myself. I felt a sense of kindness, compassion, humility and happiness in the language. If you analyze it, you can see all of these elements in the different ways words are formed, in meanings of words, how the language is action centered, how we treat each other as relatives etc. It is this spirit that exists in the language. It is the soil whose nutrients nourish our thoughts as iyiniwak, as common people. (L. Skinner, personal communication, November 4th, 2014)

Generally, fluent speakers that have a working understanding of nîhiyawîwin structure have an advantage in learning and understanding the teachings, maybe more so if nîhiyawîwin was their first language. This is because some of the teachings are embedded in nîhiyawîwin terms and most fluent speakers have the benefit of instant comprehension. Still, there are fluent speakers who are not necessarily aware of the connotative and implied meanings of words for this can

happen when one uses the language without consciously thinking about the roots and morphemes. It would also be wrong to assume that all fluent speakers have respect for nîhiyaw ways and spiritual traditions for this is certainly not the case. Knowing the language obviously has its benefits but not knowing it does not prevent people from understanding and practicing nîhiyaw ways. In my opinion there are many entry points to nîhiyaw ways of knowing and being.

The Research Questions

My research project was initially to address the question, *what are some key terms and concepts for exploring nîhiyaw tâpisiwin (Cree worldview)?*

However, as I began to focus on this question, an important secondary question that emerged was, *how can nîhiyawîwin words be translated to English and maintain their cultural integrity?* I have focused mainly on the first question but have also contributed ideas that address the second question.

This study examines the links between nîhiyaw tâpisiwin 'Cree worldview' and nîhiyawîwin 'Cree language' primarily by examining the full literal and figurative translations of important nîhiyawîwin terms, phrases and concepts that provide insight into nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and aspects of nîhiyaw cosmology. It would be presumptuous to attempt to comprehensively define something as broad as nîhiyaw tâpisiwin in a short thesis. This is why this study focuses on key terms and insights. The goal is to provide readers with a basic overview by the end of this paper and encourage the use of these ideas in any related discussions. Defining nîhiyaw tâpisiwin, even with the involvement of nîhiyawîwin practitioners that

are considered experts in the field, can be an intimidating task. What I *can* do is provide an overview of what was stated, what was written, and some translations, analysis and synthesis with my own experience and observations.

Organization

To provide a brief description and outline of this document, chapter two represents a review of existing literature pertaining to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and cosmology. It includes observations on basic structural language differences that lead to the inabilities of standard Cree dictionaries and other language resources to fully translate nîhiyaw terms and concepts. These shortcomings and possible solutions are explored further in chapter four where I review the results of the field interviews. Chapter three provides an overview of the research methodology and analysis of the research process. As described above, chapter four provides an overview of results and allows a glimpse into the thinking and observations of participants, most of whom have been nîhiyawîwin practitioners for years. Many of the participant views in chapter four reinforce the observations and conclusions of chapter two, the literature review. The thesis closes with conclusions and recommendations.

In this thesis I have supplemented my research findings by drawing on my own personal experiences as a fluent nîhiyaw speaker from East Moberly Lake, in Northeastern BC. Thus, my writing style transitions between an auto-ethnographical and a slightly more academic voice. It is also a way to ensure this thesis remains reasonably accessible to communities and non-academics. With the exception of

quotations and excerpts from other dialects, I have written mostly using the standard roman orthography (SRO) for the Northern Plains dialect that is spoken in my community.¹⁸

Purpose

One of the problems with translating nîhiyawîwin into English is there is often no context provided for important nîhiyawîwin terms. Since many of these concepts have no real English equivalents these interpretations sometimes lead to mistranslations or otherwise a misrepresentation of nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin. Readers and new learners can end up with watered down, Christianized or anglicized translations and understandings of important terms that have rich meanings to fluent speakers familiar with the structural breakdowns of morphemes, etymology, and implied meanings of nîhiyawîwin terms. Most Cree dictionaries in use today leave out terms like acahkomâmitonihcikan ‘the spirit mind’ and other concepts related to ceremonies, values and cosmology. It is not clear why dictionaries have omitted many sacred terms but it could be that, as appears to be the case with the development of *The Alberta Elders Cree Dictionary* (Leclair & Cardinal 1998), community-based contributors were reluctant to get into religious and philosophical debates around translating such terms or possibly in sharing such information with the public.

¹⁸ The writing differences between Plains Cree and Northern Plains Cree are easily adaptable. The dialects have some different word endings and slightly different variations of certain words. Plains Cree makes use of the ‘e’ vowel that is pronounced like the Canadian ‘eh’ while northern Cree use the ‘î’ vowel that represents a double ‘ee’ sound. Therefore Plains Cree is spelled nehiyaw or nêhiyaw and Northern Plains is spelled nîhiyaw. Cree SRO writing does not make use of capital letters but for easier readability I make use of capitals when a nîhiyawîwin word is at the beginning of a sentence. Most Cree dictionaries developed in Alberta or Saskatchewan accommodate both dialects.

The thesis reveals themes related to cosmology, ceremony, customs and spiritual beliefs. By identifying terms describing nîhiyaw values and principles the research reveals glimpses into traditional nîhiyaw philosophy and teachings. By identifying key words and their literal and figurative meanings, this study invites a deeper appreciation of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and provides some ideas for the future development of nîhiyawîwin language resources that accurately capture nîhiyaw perspectives and provide relevant context.

This project can serve as a resource to Cree language practitioners, activists, adult educators, curriculum writers and language learners. It is my hope that it can be added to any discussions related to projects such as:

- Identifying and revitalizing terms that are falling out of common use
- Developing strategies to mitigate semantic change and preserve culturally accurate translations
- Developing curriculum and resources such as thematic dictionaries and glossaries focused on nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and sacred terms

It is my hope that the exploration of worldviews, beliefs and cosmologies will one day be merged with efforts in other Cree dialects and with the broader Algonquian language family. I envision a room flowing with the lively dialogue and laughter of language practitioners, knowledge keepers, and elders, all with the shared aim of cross-cultural brainstorming to preserve and protect valuable knowledge for future generations. I also envision this discussion being expanded to draw in all of our nîhiyaw thinkers and intellects to deliberate on language and cultural revitalization

for the 21st century and specifically to brainstorm issues around cross-cultural borrowing and updating traditions in a conscious manner.

Despite the challenges of language retention, language acquisition and revitalization efforts in general, there is great comfort in knowing that all levels of speakers can rediscover insights into nîhiyaw tâpisiwin if they know which doors to open. There is groundwork to be done but there is hope in knowing that learners of all ages and levels can discover the meanings of nîhiyaw concepts while simultaneously learning the language to whatever degree they are capable of or comfortable with. In this sense we all have access to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin.

CHAPTER TWO: A Nîhiyaw Tâpisiwin Literature Review

Conducting a literature review on Indigenous knowledge implies that Eurocentric research can reveal an understanding of Indigenous knowledge. The problem with this approach is that Indigenous knowledge does not mirror classic Eurocentric orders of life. It is a knowledge system in its own right with its own internal consistency and ways of knowing, and there are limits to how far it can be comprehended from a Eurocentric point of view.

—Battiste, 2002, p. 2

As a ceremonialist for the last twenty years I believe strongly in dealing with spiritual knowledge in a respectful manner and in accordance to the customs I was trained in. I believe that there are ways to provide fuller translations of sacred concepts without being disrespectful or breeching protocols. I also believe that nîhiyaw intellectual traditions would have allowed for space to deliberate and to question concepts including ideas about the sacred. This chapter focuses on literature that attempts to translate various aspects of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin or more literally, the 'nîhiyaw way of seeing'. This can be a daunting task as Battiste reflects in the epigraph, for nîhiyaw ways of knowing and being are based on a paradigm that is often vastly different from western knowledge systems. This chapter analyzes resources—including some standard Cree language dictionaries—that describe concepts of nîhiyaw spirituality and cosmology. This includes the ability of these concepts to accurately represent traditional nîhiyaw sacred knowledge in relation to worldview. The emphasis here is not on defining worldview but on obtaining insights on nîhiyaw tâpisiwin through the lens of nîhiyawîwin and on the challenges of translating these concepts into English. I will describe nîhiyaw tâpisiwin loosely here as: a belief and value system including deeply entrenched spiritual principles and order of life that describes the nîhiyaw place in the universe.

This way of seeing the world would, of course, be held in common by the majority of nîhiyaw people. Since there is no shortage of academic definitions of the term worldview, the chapter will focus on elements of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin from a nîhiyaw perspective. For descriptions of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and related concepts from a nîhiyaw perspective I would first of all recommend any writings from nîhiyaw academics who are fluent speakers and can draw on their own understanding of their language and traditions.¹⁹ This is not in any way to diminish the contributions of non-fluent academics but merely to point out the reality that fluent speakers, especially ones who understand worldview and language structure, can translate nîhiyaw concepts directly without relying entirely on third party translations.

There is a multitude of publications on the philosophy, mythology, religion and spiritual traditions of North American Indigenous people as a whole, and on the sacred traditions of specific tribal nations such as the Lakota, Hopi, and other tribal cultures made popular through mainstream media, but it is more difficult to find information on nîhiyaw beliefs without knowing where to search. Nîhiyawîwin is easily the most widespread indigenous language in Canada with a relatively high number of speakers compared to other indigenous languages but until recent years there has not been an abundance of academic materials on sacred and cosmological beliefs about nîhiyaw peoples. There is even less written about these topics

¹⁹ Fortunately, the number of active scholars who are fluent Cree speakers has grown in recent years. Some who specialize in topics in the areas of worldview and beliefs include Willie Ermine, Patricia Makokis, Keith Goulet, and Herman Michell. There are also many academics that are latent Cree speakers, and still others who are actively learning Cree as adults. Personally I also think it is important to explore the worldview and cosmology writings of scholars who are fluent speakers of Anishinaabemowin and other sister languages to nîhiyawîwin.

specifically in relation to nîhiyawîwin and other Cree dialects. Fortunately, in the last two decades there has been a swift rise both in the number of nîhiyaw academics and in the number of papers that focus on various aspects of nîhiyaw beliefs and nîhiyaw worldview. In this chapter I have reviewed a cross-section of materials that focus on nîhiyaw worldview and cosmology from a variety of angles. There were a number of papers I could have included but was not able to because of my primary emphasis on field research. I have emphasized materials that focus primarily on nîhiyawîwin, but not to the exclusion of other Cree dialects.²⁰

The subject of worldview can be complex, for there are many aspects to the concept of worldview and many divergent opinions on matters related to these aspects. This thesis does not attempt to define or debate worldview; rather it explores nîhiyaw ways of thinking and being in a straightforward manner. For a variety of definitions on the concept of worldview I would recommend Michael Anthony Hart's work (2007), which provides comprehensive descriptions of worldview from nîhiyaw, indigenous, and general western perspectives including comparisons of worldviews, values, principles, and nîhiyaw ways of helping.

Issues with Translating Nîhiyawîwin into English

Not surprisingly, older Cree dictionaries are filled with many Christian missionary biases and misinterpretations. The Faries & Watkins (1986) dictionary is an example of this. This is especially true about terms pertaining to prayer, for example. Ayimîhâwin is actually the word for Christian prayer while the words for

²⁰ This would be spelled as "nêhiyawîwin" in the larger Plains dialect but I will use the northern sub-dialect spelling "nîhiyawîwin" primarily throughout this document except when quoting others. The northern dialect has been underrepresented in this field. Both words sound almost identical.

traditional Cree forms of prayer, kâkîsimowin ‘a mantra-like beseeching of the spirits’ or mawimôscikîwin ‘a type of pleading and crying out’ are omitted. This is true despite the fact that both traditional forms of supplication are considered to be a form of ceremonial nîhiyawîwin that is sometimes referred to as “high Cree”. In another example, the matotîsân ‘sweat lodge’, an important traditional ceremony, is described as, “a form of heathen sorcery used by heathen medicine men” (p. 193). Nonetheless, if one can overlook the missionary bias and understand the non-standard orthographic writing, Faries & Watkins can be a very useful tool for locating old nîhiyawîwin words that have fallen out of common use and may have been overlooked by more modern dictionaries. Dictionaries like this are a reminder of the spiritual propaganda and missionary conversion tactics that were still in place during that time, so the mistranslations and word omissions should not be a surprise. Perhaps it can also be a reminder to us all as nîhiyawîwin practitioners, to formalize the search for original meanings to key sacred terms and concepts.

One of the problems with more modern Cree dictionaries is that they cannot properly represent some important nîhiyawîwin concepts because they are not designed to provide broad and literal translations, root origins and deeper, more accurate cultural meanings. Readers often end up with watered-down, Christianized or anglicized translations of some important terms. While it is an award-winning document that is widely utilized, the *Alberta Elders’ Cree Dictionary* (1998) provides more examples of cultural misinterpretations of some key nîhiyaw concepts. The fact that the English-Cree section is minimal at best, providing only a sampling of words, can be partly attributed to the fact that nîhiyawîwin does not fit very well

within the English language structure that most dictionaries are based on. Whether by writer design or on guidance from contributing Elders (many of whom were practicing or former Catholics), many key sacred terms related to nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin and cosmology are either missing or misrepresented through overly simplified or Christian influenced translations. For example in the English to Cree section, the word 'superstition' is translated as mamahtâw kîkway kâ tâpwihtamihk, which literally means 'when somebody believes in the supernatural powers'. What this definition really refers to is the nîhiyaw belief system. Since mamahtâw kîkway 'something imbued with sacred spirit power' is considered to be deeply sacred and central to the nîhiyaw belief system, this interpretation implies that those who believe in traditional nîhiyaw cosmology and traditional ceremonial practices are superstitious. This must have led to some interesting ideological discussions among the nîhiyaw contributors. In explaining the joint efforts of Alberta elders in sorting through translations of religious concepts, one of the contributors Earle Waugh (2001) describes:

...it soon became apparent that the history of European religion, the integrative impulses of Christianity and the political situation of aboriginal culture in Canada had played and was playing a role in the interpretation of words, even among the Cree. What had to be done was a delicate balancing act between the religious interests of pre-contact Cree, insofar as they could be known, and the overwhelming dominance of Christian understanding. (p. 470)

While dictionaries like this fill much-needed gaps and aid in the process of standardizing written Cree, advanced speakers or those researching literal translations or sacred pre-European influenced Cree concepts may find such tools lacking. They present some issues that cannot be ignored, such as the profound

structural and philosophical differences between nîhiyawîwin and English, which I will expand later in this chapter in the section ‘Some Structural Issues’. Nîhiyawîwin is also a verb-based language with single verbs often making complete sentences as explained by Marie-Odile Junker et al (2012):

While English and French complexity is found at the sentence level, Cree complexity is rather found at the level of the word. In Cree, a single verb can always make up a whole sentence. This can be seen in the Cree dictionary definitions: the translations of all verbs are complete sentences. English uses many separate words and few grammatical prefixes and suffixes. Cree is quite different in that there are hundreds of different prefixes and suffixes that combine with verbs and, to a lesser extent, with nouns. Whereas a simple English sentence might consist of, say, five or six words, the same information may be conveyed in Cree using just one or two (complex) words. Verbs predominate in the Cree language; of 18,000 Cree words in the Southern dictionary 3,000 are nouns and 14,000 are verbs. (p. 14)

With these structural complexities and the hard-to-translate nîhiyawîwin concepts thus far described, it is not hard to imagine the great difficulties involved with translations and in fitting nîhiyawîwin into English dictionary formats.

Touted as the only Cree dictionary of its day to make full use of standard orthography, *The Student's Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree* by Wolfart and Ahenakew (1998) was the first dictionary with entries based on actual prose and texts. The writers do not shy away from nîhiyaw ceremonial terms although the definitions provided are quite minimal. For example, pawâkan is entered simply as ‘dream spirit’, mamahtâwisi is entered as ‘have supernatural power’, and manitow is entered as ‘spirit’ or ‘God’. With these sparse translations perhaps the writers or contributors share the belief of many traditionalists that any non-fluent learners wanting to understand more about sacred concepts should rely on oral tradition, direct experience, hands-on study, and adherence to protocols and other traditional

nîhiyaw observances. Most practitioners would agree that context is essential to understanding translation from nîhiyawîwin to English but one of the arguments of this thesis is that broader contextual information related to sacred nîhiyawîwin concepts needs to be documented and made accessible to all learners including to fluent speakers.

A more recent publication is the two-volume dictionary *Cree: Words* (2001) compiled and edited by linguist Arok Wolvengrey. Working with some of the top nîhiyawîwin language practitioners in Western Canada such as Jean Okimasis, Solomon Ratt and Freda Ahenakew, Wolvengrey does not shy away from trying to explain sacred terminologies that can be deemed sensitive in some nîhiyaw communities. In translating the word 'power', he goes to great lengths in providing many variations related to sacred power including the nîhiyaw concepts of spirit power, dream power and supernatural power. Whereas the word manitow is generally translated simply as 'God', Wolvengrey translates it as a spirit—'a spirit being or a god'—which more accurately presents an inclusive, flexible, and holistic picture, consistent with nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. This nîhiyaw concept has changed over time because today it obviously means different things to different speakers.

Earle Waugh, who worked in developing the *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary*, explained that there were many religious issues to contend with directly resulting from the influence of Christianity on older nîhiyaw concepts including much debate over translation of the term manitow, which is described as both 'a sacred power or god' and as 'the basic mysterious quality in the universe'. Waugh explains: "Thus

every context will bequeath a certain meaning to the use of manito²¹...it can have no identifiable meaning standing alone, without some kind of context” (2001, p. 473).

He further adds that while no ontological being represents manitow, the word is still used in nîhiyaw religious discourse and affirms a superior quality and beauty in the universe (p. 474). Waugh’s observations on this concept are consistent with the fact that many nîhiyawîwin words change meaning on a contextual basis, and that many words have multiple meanings. Inferring that perhaps nîhiyawîwin is more fluid than other languages, he observes: “The Cree do not hold words to be very solid—they move around in a conceptual universe, and manito is one word that may move a great deal” (p. 474). This is a fairly accurate observation, albeit the first point in the sentence is exaggerated because there are also nîhiyawîwin words and concepts that are quite fixed.

Nîhiyaw cosmology is not easy to categorize through a western lens and does not clearly fit into the religious categories of monotheistic, polytheistic, and pantheistic. Our stories (and the stories of other Algonquians) describe kihcimanitow, which really means ‘great or sacred spirit’. It can be ascertained that this being was a benevolent life force, a spirit that sat above the pawâkanak ‘dream spirits’ and âtayohkanak ‘sacred cosmological spirits’, and other spirits that were the intermediary forces more accessible to humans.²² Deloria, in explaining the concept of a God-like energy common to indigenous Peoples, describes:

²¹ Writers not familiar with the standardized orthographic writing of Cree sometimes spell manitow as manito or manitou, etc.

²² True to the relational nature of nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin, these forces are also known as grandmothers, grandfathers, and other kinship terms.

...the feeling or belief that the universe is energized by a pervading power. Scholars have traditionally called the presence of this power *mana*, following Polynesian beliefs, but we find it among tribal peoples, particularly American Indian tribes, as *wakan*, *orenda*, or *manitou*. (2012, p. 203)

Being a spirit, kihcimanitow is different from the gods of Christianity and other monotheistic religions in that humans are not made in God's image and that God can never be known or comprehended. Most monotheistic religions claim to have knowledge of the image of God, and according to Deloria, "this knowledge is transformed into creeds, doctrines, and dogmas, and religion eventually becomes a cognitive exercise rather than an experience" (2012, p. 253). Kihcimanitow is a reminder of our human frailty and weakness and explains why nîhiyaw teachings and laws greatly emphasize humility and de-emphasize self-centeredness. Deloria's description fits with a nîhiyaw cosmology based on equality, relatedness, and harmonious relationships where humans do not rank above other beings. Nîhiyawak do not traditionally share the Christian doctrine of dominion over the natural world. Deloria sees this type of indigenous worldview as a deeply profound and evolutionary theology:

All species, all forms of life, have equal status before the presence of a universal power to which all are subject. The religious requirement for all life forms is thus harmony, and this requirement holds for every species, ours included. The natural world has a great bond that brings together all living entities, each species gaining an identity and meaning as it forms a part of the complex whole. (p. 204)

Deloria adds further that in cutting their bonds to nature, monotheistic world religions move away from this type of harmonious theology: "The elimination of emotional intensity and intuitive insights into the world, which is accomplished by the great 'world' religions, twists this basic apprehension of reality" (p. 204).

Whatever beliefs nîhiyaw peoples have adopted or absorbed since colonization, there is no doubting that Christianity has profoundly affected nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and nîhiyawîwin for better or for worse. Again describing his work with nîhiyaw elders in Alberta, Earle Waugh states:

In the course of my work in the north I have talked to several who disagreed with the integrationist approach taken by some elders. Old-timers in my experience saw clearly that there were significant tensions between Christian notions and Cree concepts. I don't know if any of these people are still alive. (Personal correspondence, 12 January 2014)

Political and religious ideologies can impact any language, affecting how words and concepts are translated and viewed. With Canada's history of colonization, assimilation policies, and the residential school syndrome, nîhiyawîwin is no exception. I will expand more on the concept of manitow in chapter four.

Despite shortcomings and limitations, most Cree dictionaries, both new and old, are valuable resources to both nîhiyaw instructors and learners whether they are beginners or advanced speakers, for nîhiyaw learning never ends. They are required for references, analysis, and comparative purposes and as valuable complements to nîhiyaw oral traditions. Mary Young reminds us that while dictionaries are good for preserving words, they cannot teach us indigenous worldviews or the spirit of a language, "...we need to write our own languages from our perspective, our way of knowing, from our worldview, and not from the translation of the words from English" (2003, p. 105).

In addition to historic Christian encroachment, there are other issues that impact how nîhiyawîwin words are interpreted. As I've touched on, cultural appropriation or fear of it is one concern, but there are also issues like pan-

Indianism and new-age influence. Combined with aspects of modernization such as mass communication and social networking, it is easy to understand how *nîhiyawîwin* terms can be relegated to speculation or subjected to wide-scale misinformation, even by people with completely innocent and well-meaning intentions. Margaret Kovach, in her dissertation (2006), interviewed Maori educator Graham Smith, who pointed out:

Put Maori at the centre of the discussion and the discourse, it's positive and proactive. In other words it asserts what we are about. It reflects our cultural epistemology and language, so that's where I have got a bit of difficulty with some people, they are claiming Indigenous theorizing and they have no notion of language whatsoever, so they are not actually hooked into deeper meanings of cultural nuances. There is a disconnection. (p. 199)

As a specific example, the word *nîhiyawak*, which is used to identify the Plains Cree, is described by some fluent speakers as a shortcut word derived from *nîwo-iyinowak*, meaning 'four directions people', while others, including scholars like Daniels-Fiss, define it as 'an exact person' (2008, p. 233).²³ Still, some elders simply claim that the original meaning has been lost. The original meaning is not known by elders in my own community, but by calling on key elders from the larger *nîhiyaw* community or knowing of the credible reputations that follow certain knowledge keepers, important information can still be found. According to Walter Lightning, a fluent speaker from Maskwacîs who was trained by elders for most of his life, the texts of the late Elder Louis Sunchild shed some light on the literal meaning of *nîhiyaw*. Lightning's interpretation breaks the meaning down and ponders further questions:

²³ Eastern Cree speakers do not use the term "nehiyaw" but "*iyiniw*", which literally means a "person or a human being". The term "Nehiyaw" (Plains proper) or the dialectical variations "*nîhiyaw*" (Northern Plains), "*nîhithaw*" (Woodland), or "*Nehinuw*" (Muskego) are only used in Western Canada.

The word “nehiyaw” can be broken down into its sound components to find root words. “Nîwo” means “four” and “-iyaw” or “miyaw” means, “body”. That means “People of the four body”. Four is a metaphor of tremendous sacred significance...Does that also mean “four dimensions” or perhaps “four domains”? (1992, p. 83)

Some language practitioners such as Reuben Quinn interpret the concept of ‘four body’ to mean the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional aspects of humans, which fits nicely with the nîhiyaw philosophical emphasis on the importance of holistic balance and on the sacred significance of the number four (R. Quinn, personal communication, May 26th, 2014). With all of these possible translations of this one term, one can see the difficulties that the developers of dictionaries and other language resources must face in their work.

In another example, the concept okâwîmâwaskiy, which translates to ‘mother earth’, is believed by most original speakers to not be a part of the traditional nîhiyawîwin vocabulary. It is certainly not a term that was used in my community or in neighbouring nîhiyaw communities. There are fluent elders and speakers who would argue that okâwîmâwaskiy, the compounding of okâwîmâw meaning ‘mother’ and askiy, the word for ‘earth’ or ‘land’, is a contemporary concept resulting from pan-Indian or new-age influence. Keith Goulet (2008, p. 11-12) describes this concept as an improper use of Cree grammar because the word okâwîmâw is animate and the word askiy is inanimate. These words cannot be properly combined. Goulet states that he does not believe that it is an inappropriate concept, but that it is simply an adopted one because it does not fit within the Cree grammatical structure. Given the close holistic connection we had with the land and spirit world; and given that trees, plant varieties, rocks, creatures, and many entities

immediately born of the land are seen as animate, I would argue that many elders do see the earth as a form of sacred living entity. These views are often reflected in the âtayohkîwina 'sacred stories', in the traditional prayers, and in the affectionate way that the land is spoken of by elders and traditionalists. Many nîhiyaw oral narratives describe the landscape as being alive, and ceremonial offerings continue to be required for the taking of medicinal plants, including ones not spoken of in animate terms. Since the term askiy can mean dirt, soil, landmass, or territory, was it even originally used to describe the earth or the world as a whole, or is this an adopted concept? Evan Pritchard claims, "For example, there is no Micmac word equivalent to 'earth,' in the English sense, although the word earth is always used several times in any pseudo-Indian prayer" (1997, p. 202). Since the word wihtaskamihk means 'across the entire land' to describe the entire continent, and the word akâmaskihk means 'the land on the other side' to describe lands across the sea, some might argue that these terms are indicators that there was no broad term to describe the earth. Some might theorize that the term askiy was simply expanded to take in the meaning of the earth as a whole. Perhaps it was inevitable that the concept of 'mother earth' was adopted because it was a philosophical and cosmological fit and that the language simply never had the time required to reflect this. These speculations can certainly be controversial and never ending, but they point to the need for ongoing discussions among nîhiyaw intellectuals, language practitioners, and knowledge keepers. Terms and concepts can change, expand or fall out of use very quickly. This makes the culturally relevant documentation of sacred and older nîhiyawîwin concepts ever more important and timely. I would

argue that despite the need for revitalization efforts of nîhiyawîwin as a living language, there remains an ongoing need for researching and documenting old nîhiyaw terms and knowledge before this information becomes completely lost.

Some Structural Issues

Most Cree dictionaries are designed on a linguistic framework that does not suit nîhiyawîwin. A study of any nîhiyaw resource that describes language structure will quickly reveal this fact. For more detailed information on nîhiyawîwin structure, the classic among language practitioners is *Cree Language Structures* by Freda Ahenakew (1987). For shorter more accessible overviews I would recommend *Cree: Language of The Plains* (Okimasis & Ratt, 1999) or *Comparative Structures of East Cree and English* (Junker, Mackenzie & Brittain, 2012). As an example of structural differences between nîhiyawîwin and English in his *Cree Words Dictionary*, Wolvengrey notes:

This volume contains in excess of 15,000 Cree entries. Given the extensive word formation rules of the Cree language, many of these entries must be translated by entire sentences in English. As a result, the English-Cree glossary often lists a single Cree word under a number of different English keywords, resulting in well over 35,000 English entries. (2001, p. ix)

To argue the point of structural differences further, Muehlbauer states:

Languages like Cree present particular problems for making dictionaries because the words are exceptionally complex. Unlike languages like English – where dictionaries were largely developed – Cree does not have a simple ‘word’ to place in the dictionary. For example, the word ‘see’ in English corresponds to as many as 500+ ‘words’ in Cree (*niwâpahtên, wâpamêw, wâpamâw, ê-wâpamaci*, etc.)...Rather than put all 500+ words in the dictionary, Cree linguists have decided to follow the example of classical languages like Greek and Sanskrit (which also have huge numbers of verbs) and simply give you one form for each word. It is up to you, the user, to know how to turn this word into the form you want. (January 3rd, 2014)

This would be a daunting task for a novice language learner unfamiliar with the proper construction of nîhiyawîwin words.

Nîhiyawîwin is a conjugated, verb-heavy language and many nouns cannot exist without a verb component. For example, the word for rain does not stand on its own as a noun but only exists as îkimowan literally meaning, ‘it is raining’. The nîhiyawîwin word for wind is yôtin meaning ‘it is windy’ or ‘it is winding’. Clearly, nîhiyawîwin does not fit easily into the dictionary format designed for English language structures. As Muehlbauer states: “Most languages that have complex words end up having to make these kinds of decisions – or else your dictionary would be 900,000 pages and weigh 80 lbs” (January 3rd, 2014). This certainly challenges the common but unfortunate western notions that Indigenous languages are simple or primitive. Any linguists who have studied nîhiyawîwin have likely discovered this fact very early in their work.

Elders who are conscious of Christian influences on nîhiyawîwin are also sometimes unable or reluctant to provide information on aspects of ‘the sacred’ for fear of providing bits of information that could be taken out of context or exploited.²⁴ There are some Indigenous scholars who would argue that since nîhiyaw culture and nîhiyawîwin are oral, nîhiyaw concepts can never be fully conveyed through any written format. As Weber-Pillwax (2001) observes:

The meanings of Cree words as written are usually not reflective of the nature of primary orality in the culture. The tendency is to use Cree words

²⁴ These fears of exploitation and cultural appropriation have been ongoing issues with indigenous peoples worldwide. I have personally witnessed such disclosures during years of interactions and personal correspondence with First Nations communities, leaders, and elders in “Treaty 8” territory and also throughout Canada.

with English translations that are “literate,” that is, they fit into a literate society. Unfortunately for both the English-speaker and for the Cree-speaker, neither is really benefitting from the richness of meaning that is actually imbedded in the Cree words, as would be the case if these were to be totally and accurately interpreted. (p.158)

This might also partly explain the reluctance of some Elders to explain complicated nîhiyaw concepts including teachings that are considered sacred. As if these problems were not complicated enough, consider the fact that adhering to face-to-face ceremonial protocols is often an entry point for any exchange of sacred knowledge. In reflecting the input of many nîhiyaw elders, Ermine and colleagues reinforce the sensitive nature of sacred knowledge exchange: “Sensitive issues and sacred information that cannot be disclosed would warrant crucial attention and for the careful interpretation and translation of any information accessed in the community” (Ermine, Sinclair & Browne 2005, p. 21).

It will always be a challenge to accurately interpret nîhiyaw thinking in written format. Does this mean that academics, including traditionalists who happen to also be scholars, should not attempt to do so? With Cree communities losing key knowledge keepers and elders every year, there seems little time for debate on this matter. Perhaps a more appropriate question for nîhiyaw language practitioners to consider is, *how can we research and document sacred traditional knowledge in a manner that is culturally appropriate and minimizes the risk of exploitation?*

Early Writings on Nîhiyaw Tâpwihtamowina (Beliefs)

Despite his Eurocentric biases and ensuing inability to fully comprehend the full spectrum of nîhiyaw thought, Mandelbaum (1940/2001) probably did the best he could with what were accepted research approaches at the time. *The Plains Cree* was first published in 1940 and represents his first-hand accounts of nîhiyaw life in the 1930s as well as oral contributions of nîhiyaw ‘informants’ from decades previous to this. His study remains an important account of Plains Cree life and provides useful descriptions of early rites and his interpretations of beliefs related to nîhiyaw ceremonies as they were being practiced at that time. Particularly useful are his brief descriptions of the ‘supernaturals’—the soul, the afterlife, and the nîhiyaw concept of heaven (p. 157-9). Doing a credible job of writing nîhiyawîwin words using phonetic spelling almost consistent with standard roman orthography, Mandelbaum tackles concepts such as manitow, acahk, âtayohkanak, pawâkanak, and macimanitow, the ‘evil spirit’. Mandelbaum’s attempt at using nîhiyawîwin terms provides some clues to early nîhiyaw concepts related to cosmology and points to areas of possible Christian influences. Even if his observations on Christian influence or pre-colonial nîhiyaw spiritual beliefs are not entirely accurate, they call such issues into our consciousness and challenge us to keep on asking questions about Christian influences on nîhiyawîwin and nîhiyaw tâpisinowin. Recovering the original nîhiyaw spiritual beliefs in the face of overwhelming historic Christian influence is an area that requires attention. Despite Mandelbaum’s failure to properly acknowledge the nîhiyaw contributors, he appears to have had great

respect for nîhiyaw culture and was able to solicit contributions from influential nîhiyaw leaders such as Chief Fine Day and Stan Cuthand, who are considered experts on nîhiyaw oral history. As such, not all of his observations should be dismissed as lacking in historical accuracy simply because he was another outsider with an ethnocentric perspective. Despite the inevitable cultural bias, the book provides a useful benchmark for comparing his observations with nîhiyaw oral history and other written perspectives on nîhiyaw beliefs and ceremonialism. This work also provides a collection of old nîhiyawîwin terms for kinship, birds, fish, berries, and traditional foods that could be useful in glossary resources related to traditional plants, foods, and wildlife.

I have included Joseph Dion's work in this chapter as an example of early writing from a nîhiyaw point of view. Writing primarily from an oral tradition, Dion's (1979) Christian beliefs are evident in his narrative, but so is the richness of the oral traditions of his family, his respect for ancient nîhiyaw spiritual practices, and his descriptions of sacred terms and ceremonies. Prefixes such as *kisî* 'gentleness/gentleness/compassion' and *kihci* 'great, special, or sacred' in their relation to the root word *manitow*, are an example of how his writings can provide insight into nîhiyaw *tâpisiwin*.²⁵ Waugh, however, would argue that this definition of *manitow* as God is a narrow interpretation and clearly a Christian influence in stating, "Clearly the people who originally translated *manito* knew that God was not a good translation, even though *kihci*manito does constitute an

²⁵ Dion defines *manitow* as God in his writings but some elders also describe *manitow* as a spirit.

important Algonquin concept,²⁶ and the Cree people freely use it in Christian discourse” (2001, p. 475). To bring home this point Hart adds:

While Kise-manitow has often been interpreted as Great Spirit, alternative interpretations have also been shared, including kind spirit, and great mystery. So while there is often acceptance of the idea of a supreme being through such interpretations as Great Spirit, it is also acknowledged that people, as a simple part of creation, do not know Kise-manitow other than through our experiences with the rest of creation (2007, p.29)

Dion also offers a description of the original nîhiyaw calendar that may shed further light on nîhiyaw beliefs (p. 168-9). It would be important to verify all of this information with knowledgeable nîhiyaw elders who are conscious of Christian influences on the language and still have familiarity with old nîhiyawîwin concepts and terminology.

Worth including in this review is *Orders of the Dreamed* (Brown & Brightman, 2004) simply because the journal of fur trader George Nelson, written in 1823 and describing his experiences from 1803-21, is one of the only detailed portrayals of nîhiyaw and Anishinabe ceremonial practices before the 20th century. Aside from Nelson’s Christian bias, inaccurate translations, and judgments about nîhiyaw practices, the journals describe the characteristics of various âtayohkanak of the nîhiyaw cosmological order first hand and through nîhiyaw informants of the day. In the final notes of Brown & Brightman, Cree scholar Emma Larocque sums up Nelson’s ethnocentricity: “His struggle was framed by his engagement in the western dichotomization of white civilization over Indian savagery.” (p. 203).

²⁶ When Waugh describes an Algonquin concept he is referring to all nations of a linguistic family. Nîhiyawîwin is part of the Algonquin or Algonquian linguistic family along with Anishinaabemowin, Mi’kmaq, Innu, and other languages in Eastern Canada and parts of what is now America and Mexico. Most of these languages share similar structures, beliefs, cosmologies, and even certain terms. Linguists believe that there was once a proto-Algonquian language.

Nelson at least befriended his informants and took the time to learn the languages, but it is doubtful that he ever grasped nîhiyaw or Anishinabe tâpisiwin. Still, he was enlightened in comparison to most other early European fur traders. Some ceremonies change over time and adapt to modern realities and inter-tribal borrowing but other ceremonies remain relatively the same. The information about the countless ceremonies and deities described in this book is perfect for discussion and verification with traditional elders and faith keepers familiar with the old ceremonies.

A Holistic Paradigm

In much the same way as many practicing nîhiyawak have trouble grasping a linear and compartmentalized world, it has been my own personal experience that many westerners who have been acculturated and conditioned into the western mindset have great difficulty in understanding concepts related to a holistic paradigm. Rather than studying surface phenomena like how cultures interpret colors, as Deutscher did in his book *Through The Looking Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages* (2010), perhaps the links between language, holistic thinking and learning styles are areas contemporary relativists should focus on to provide more substantive arguments for their theories. In the meantime, most nîhiyaw language practitioners are content to embrace the fact that nîhiyawîwin shapes our views and beliefs.

In many ways similar to the indigenous holistic concepts on pedagogy presented by Cajete (2000), *nîhithaw*²⁷ scholar Herman Michell (2013) describes ways to assist educators in coming to understand the larger holistic frameworks of Cree worldview and to utilize this knowledge in their teaching methodologies. In explaining part of this holistic understanding Michell describes:

Our way of life is inseparable from our spiritual ceremonies, stories, songs, dances, drums, symbols, and metaphors, all of which taken together, reinforce our Cree worldview. Embedded within these cultural expressions are complex teachings, Cree laws, and ethical principles of living with and through the natural world...Cree philosophy rejects notions of segregation, objectivity, alienation, separation, and attitudes of superiority, as all human life is dependent on being related. (p. 32)

These concepts shape our pedagogy and learning styles, and as Hart (2010) points out, it is also important to incorporate these holistic Indigenous worldviews in conducting community research. Referencing some highly esteemed scholars and drawing on his own Woodland Cree experiences, Hart emphasizes the complexities of worldviews including how they adapt. He gives many examples of the pervasiveness of Eurocentric thought and how it marginalizes Indigenous worldviews. He describes the need for recognizing aspects of an Indigenous worldview such as epistemology, ontology, and axiology in relation to *nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin* but I wonder if these are just further western constructs. Is this not unnecessary fragmentation and compartmentalization of a holistic *nîhiyaw* worldview that is based on an all-encompassing interconnectedness? To take this further, there are no direct single *nîhiyawîwin* words for concepts like ontology and only vaguely related words for a concept like epistemology. The word

²⁷ *Nîhithaw* refers to a Woodland Cree person and *nîhithawîwin* represents this dialect. It is closely related to *nîhiyawîwin*.

kiskihtamowin, which translates as ‘knowledge or a type of knowledge’, may be the closest idea we have to epistemology. The term nistohtamowin, meaning ‘understanding’ represents a deeper level of knowledge and absorption of knowledge at an emotional if not spiritual level as opposed to merely at a cognitive level. Goulet and Goulet recognize kiskihtamowin and nistohtamowin as two formal and distinct levels of Cree knowledge. They also struggle to translate concepts like ‘epistemology’ into the Nehinaw dialect:

Presenting the Nehinuw²⁸ concepts of philosophy and epistemology in the English language is challenging. Even the word *epistemology* is problematic to a Nehinuw speaker, since Cree has two major concepts of knowledge and understanding that include the embedded aspects of action and interaction. (2014, p. 58-9)

In nîhiyaw pedagogy there is a high value placed on the development of intuition and there is a broader definition of intelligence. Nîhiyaw intelligence is intertwined with wisdom, aptitudes and the senses including the non-physical senses.

As many writers remind us, nîhiyawîwin words only make sense within a contextual framework. But it is fluid and efficient when it comes to certain ideas, and some word meanings change with the context in which they are used.

Pimâtisowin generally means ‘life’ but it can also mean ‘culture’ or a specific way of living. Sihcikîwina generally means ‘ways of doing things’ but it can also describe methods of organizing and leading. The closest term to worldview is tâpisiwin, which literally means ‘a way of seeing’. In other words, tâpisiwin is a mindset and it seems to cover most aspects of the concept ‘holistic worldview’ without having to fragment it. In Oren Lyons’ words, “The primary law of Indian government is the

²⁸ To avoid confusion for people new to dialects, this word is the ‘N’ or Swampy Cree version of nîhiyaw. In my own dialect, we would refer to our cultural brethren as *maskîkawînowak*, people of the muskeg.

spiritual law. Spirituality is the highest form of politics, and our spirituality is directly involved in government” (cited in Makokis, 2008, p. 40).

Similarly, the nîhiyaw holistic paradigm does not clearly distinguish between values, principles, ethics, and wiyasowîwina, ‘the laws’.²⁹ Based on the language there is no distinct boundary between nîhiyaw philosophy, worldview, ontology or knowledge. From a language perspective there is overlap in meaning between nîhiyawîwin words like pimâtisowin ‘life or culture’, sihcikîwina ‘ways of doing things’, and nîhiyawâtisowin ‘Greeness’. There is not a clear separation between the earthly plane and the spirit world. Holism is not just a distant, romantic metaphor; it is a part of daily life, at least for those of us who grew up immersed in the language and traditions. Nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin is so completely based on a holistic paradigm that very little in the nîhiyaw world is seen as isolated.

Berkes describes the nîhiyaw concept of relationships between humans, land, animals, and spirits. These relationships are a reminder that ecological knowledge cannot be separated from spiritual and cosmological beliefs. Berkes did not overtly refer to this inter-relatedness but the interconnection seems obvious:

Hunters have certain obligations to fulfill toward the animals, maintaining a respectful relationship. A continued proper use of resources is important for sustainability. Cree social values such as reciprocity apply to human - animal as well as to social relationships. These beliefs indicate a cosmology in which humans are part of a “community of beings” within the ecological system. (2008, p. 105)

In the nîhiyaw world there is no clear separation between the realities of self, society, environment, or the cosmos. Many nîhiyaw elders and language

²⁹ As an example of this similarity between values and laws, see Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Foundational Laws at <http://www.muskeglake.com/services/community-justice/Cree-law>.

practitioners also argue that *nîhiyaw tâpisiwin* must be lived in order for it to be fully understood. It is doubtful that fragmenting *nîhiyawîwin* through a western lens can lead to a meaningful understanding, but from a *nîhiyaw* perspective, getting to know *nîhiyawîwin* will help one to understand *nîhiyaw tâpisiwin*.

The Spiritual Nature of *Nîhiyawîwin*

As alluded to above, *nîhiyaw kiskihtamowin*, ‘Cree knowledge’ is never separate from spiritual beliefs or the constant awareness of other living entities. Cosmological terms and concepts are ever-present in everyday language use. Many traditionalists believe that the language itself has a spirit and that recognizing and engaging the spirit of *nîhiyawîwin* can help learners to gain insights into the language. In this way ceremony becomes a part of the learning process. In traditional *nîhiyaw* pedagogy, new worlds of meaning unfold as an elder or a mentor perceives the readiness of a learner. In explaining the teaching styles of traditional *nîhiyaw* elders, Walter Lightning reminds us that even fluent *nîhiyawîwin* speakers have to be very aware of the spiritual connotations, metaphors and layers of meaning:

It is assumed that there will be effort to think mutually with the Elder. The assumption is that active attention, humility of the hearer, and respect for the Elder, will put one in the frame of mind where the minds can meet (1992 p. 62).

On this Lightning further expands:

Minds engage in mutual discourse; one of the structural ways this is effected is not to attempt to state everything categorically or specifically, but to state things in such a way that there is a continuing unfolding of meaning, as the learner follows the implications of a statement, and then checks it for “internal coherence” to see if the learner is “putting it together” properly. It is based upon engagement and attention between the Elder and the learner. Its

meaning depends upon the cognitive act of grasping the meaning, realization, insight. It has implication for learning and teaching: learning is not a product of transferring information between a teacher and a student. It is a product of creation and re-creation, in a mutual relationship of personal interaction, of information. It is not just a cognitive (mental) act, but an emotional – thus physical – act. Learning is felt. It is a sensation. It is something that involves emotions. And as the elder here points out, learning is ideally a spiritual thing, because the compassionate mind is one that is spiritually centered. (p. 64)

Many nîhiyaw concepts represent deeper and expanded levels of meaning and cannot be conveyed simply, even to fluent speakers. It is especially difficult to convey such concepts when they are translated into English. This, however, does not mean that we should not try. Neal McLeod shares some insights on aspects of nîhiyaw cosmology and provides thorough translations that give readers accurate representations of language and narrative. McLeod explains nîhiyaw values such as humility and fittingly refers to nîhiyaw cosmology as a spiritual history of the people:

Within the Cree language, there are several insights that allow us to construct what we might call “spiritual history.” The term for the narratives of the elder brother (*wîsahkîcahk*) is *âtayohkêwina*. The term can also apply to other narratives involving spiritual beings, which are described as *âtayohkanak*, which means “spiritual helpers,” spiritual grandfathers and grandmothers. These narratives are essential because they give insight into the way in which Cree people related to their ecology and the environment, and with other beings. (2007, p. 17)

McLeod also provides glimpses into nîhiyaw concepts such as *pawâkanak*, ‘dream spirit helpers’ and *mamahtâwisiwin*, ‘tapping into the supernatural world’, a central aspect of nîhiyaw consciousness. The *âtayohkêwina* are not relegated to mythic tales as defined through Western eyes, but as sacred narratives that provide some clues about nîhiyaw cosmology. The common misconception of *wîsahkîcahk*, a central figure in nîhiyaw cosmology, as simply a trickster or buffoon-like character, is also

addressed. While it is true that there are humorous folk tale versions of *wîsahkîcahk*, as well as sacred *âtayohkîwina* stories that describe him as both benevolent and foolish, he is still an important *âtayohkan* figure that teaches us about adventure, creativity, humor, and about our relatedness to all other life forms. Since *wîsahkîcahk* is prone to making mistakes despite his sacred supernatural abilities, he teaches us about humility and balance and reminds *nîhiyawak* that while we should strive for goodness, we are not burdened with the pressure of being perfect. *Nîhiyawîwin* speakers fondly refer to this sacred figure as *kistîsinaw*, ‘our big brother’ (inclusive of all) both in formal ceremony and in everyday conversation.

On the basis of his work with hunters from James Bay, who speak a dialect of East Cree quite different from *nîhiyawîwin*, Colin Scott provides some useful insights into *nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin*. The literal translations of Cree words in this document are especially useful as is the reminder that many Cree concepts are dependant on context. For example, Scott makes it clear that the Cree way of seeing the world contrasts with many European concepts:

In Cree, there is no word corresponding to our term ‘nature’. There is a word *pimaatisiwin*, ‘life’, which includes human as well as animal ‘persons’. The word for ‘persons’ *iyyiyuu*, can itself be glossed as ‘he lives’. Human, animals, spirits and some geophysical agents are perceived to have qualities of personhood. All persons act in a reciprocally communicative reality. (1989, p. 195)

The word *pimaatisiwin* in the above quotation is further described as not just life but as continuous rebirth.³⁰ The word for mind or consciousness,

³⁰ Written in *nîhiyawîwin* as *pimâtisowin* and meaning much the same.

umituunaaichikanich (p.195) is translated as ‘mind and heart, thought and feeling’, indicating thinking as not just a cognitive function but as a more integrated, spiritual process using more of our senses. East Cree worldview concepts provide a very useful comparative tool that can shed light on the sacred aspects of nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin or at least provide some clues to pre-colonial thinking and spiritual beliefs. While the ceremonies and languages may be different, it is believed that the Eastern and Western Cree peoples share some similar value systems and core beliefs.

Daniels-Fiss, a latent nîhiyawîwin speaker, rediscovered her own history in order to “understand the structure of the Cree language and philosophy” and to relearn the language to be able to “speak from a Cree worldview” (2008, p. 233, 234). Her endeavour is a great example of the benefits of nîhiyawîwin acquisition and on the importance of understanding the deeper meanings and beliefs embedded within the language. It is clear that the writer also understands some primary philosophical differences between nîhiyawîwin and English language structures:

When learning Cree as an adult, I struggled (and at times I continue to struggle) with many aspects of the Cree language including its structure, lexicon, and worldview. The language is complex: multiple prefixes and suffixes, animate or less-animate gender distinctions, and no masculine or feminine genders as in English. (2008, p. 235)

Sections of the article provide insights into nîhiyaw philosophies and values such as humility and into the concepts of cooperative learning as in the word kiskinahamâtowin, which is a more inclusive and cooperative form of education than standard Western pedagogy. All in all, the author’s process of rediscovering and relearning nîhiyawîwin as an adult is a commendable feat, particularly in that

she learned it in a conscious manner, examining the literal translations and teachings imbedded in the language.

Conclusions

The spiritual teachings, lessons, laws, history, connection to land, and our cosmologies are imbedded in the language. As Michell reminds us, “Cree words contain hidden knowledge, teachings, lessons, and reminders of our relatedness” (2013, p. 39). It is up to language learners and those seeking the spiritual nîhiyaw path to find the deeper teachings embedded in nîhiyawîwin. There is no doubt that immersion and direct experiential approaches are consistent with nîhiyaw pedagogy and are generally considered the proper methods to gaining an understanding of traditional nîhiyaw knowledge. For adult learners, however, exploring the various root meanings of nîhiyawîwin sacred terms and morphemes would greatly aid this process.

In this chapter I explored the concept of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin, demonstrated its link to nîhiyawîwin and provided basic insights on nîhiyaw ways and nîhiyawîwin language structure. I also critiqued standard dictionary approaches on the basis of their abilities to interpret some sacred terms related to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and identified the challenges in translating such concepts. In doing so, I also provided a variety of perspectives on the concept of manitow and other nîhiyaw concepts. I also provided an overview of early writings and described issues related to Christian influence on nîhiyawîwin. Finally, I described the holistic paradigm and touched on the sacred nature of nîhiyawîwin.

It is time to design new culturally relevant translation formats that are geared around nîhiyawîwin language structures and beliefs and unfiltered (or at least minimally filtered) nîhiyaw perspectives. The identification of key words and their linguistic roots and literal and figurative translations will elicit a deeper understanding and appreciation of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and cosmology that will ensure accessibility for new language learners and future generations of nîhiyawak. Chapter four on research results will explore these ideas further.

CHAPTER THREE: Nisihcikiwina (Methodology)

If the Native Peoples and their heritage are to be understood, it is their beliefs, insights, concepts, ideals, values, attitudes, and codes that must be studied.

—Basil Johnston, 1976, Preface

My methodological approach was based on Indigenous research theory with an emphasis on obtaining qualitative interviews over quantitative data. More importantly, it was an attempt at a process that adheres to the nîhiyaw principles of respect, relationship building and adherence to nîhiyaw protocols and communication styles, particularly in interviews with elders. As such, I focused on a relational methodology process that is consistent with nîhiyaw teachings and conduct. Initially, this called for:

- Adherence to a specific nîhiyaw ceremonial protocol for opening communications.
- Recognizing participants as the knowledge keepers they are and treating them accordingly.
- Employing an interview process that allowed maximum comfort to participants.

As Ermine and colleagues remind us based on a study of research ethics involving largely nîhiyaw elders, “Creating a safe environment for research to be carried out is one of the priorities of the Elders”(Ermine, Sinclair & Browne, 2005, p.21). These nîhiyaw ethics required me to be absolutely respectful and humble in my dealings with knowledge keepers. A relational approach requires a willingness to offer food, refreshments, a form of service or some other gestures of gratitude and

appreciation for the time commitment of participants. This requires me to not pretend to be an objective outsider but to be fully engaged and authentic in all my dealings with participants and to recognize them as esteemed contributors, not as research subjects. I would like to call this a participatory approach because I believe in the principles associated with community-based, participatory research but in the end, I still conducted interviews (albeit discussion-based) and the writing and analysis are still my own. This approach however, calls for participants to review their input to ensure proper representation. In this limited sense, they are stakeholders and co-creators. It is my hope that at least some of the issues and ideas presented here will be considered in their work as practitioners.

My research is not designed to deliver a product or some grand truth; rather it is qualitative and process oriented. I am 'giving back' to participants and to the larger nîhiyawîwin community by providing copies of the final thesis documents to all participants and being willing to participate in any ensuing discussions.

In the realm of indigenous academia, I believe there has already been much stated about the decolonizing aspects of post-colonial indigenous research theory so I don't have anything new to add to this discussion. In the spirit of this theory, I continue to be mindful of the pervasiveness of colonial thinking and be conscious of the subtle and not so subtle ways that the English language is used to overpower and diminish Indigenous Peoples and efforts. Language can be very political and, just like nîhiyawîwin has hidden spiritual meanings imbedded in the language, English terms, depending on how they are used, can reveal attitudes, biases, and agendas. Some nîhiyawîwin terms and concepts innately challenge many western

concepts and beliefs about the world but in doing so, can also offer alternatives and a different way of viewing and operating in life. Understanding *nîhyawîwin* and *nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin* can be empowering not just for the purpose of identity, spirituality or sense of belonging but also because *nîhiyaw* knowledge can inform and guide *nîhiyaw* law, *nîhiyaw* leadership and governance, *nîhiyaw* intellectual traditions, and many other areas that we deal with in a modern world. *Nîhiyaw* knowledge is still relevant. *Nîhiyawîwin* practitioners need to look for the hidden meanings in both *nîhiyawîwin* and English terms and concepts. Making use of the *nîhiyaw* concept of *nâkatohkîwin* described in the opening story could help strengthen this awareness of deeper meanings.³¹

I believe that any sincere work to revitalize and learn our languages and protect indigenous knowledge systems and cultural institutions is an affirmation of our identities and nationhood. Being a practicing *nîhiyaw* is a sacred privilege and birthright that comes with responsibilities to seek and affirm our Creeness.³² It is an assumption that being a 'practising *nîhiyaw*' will mean inevitably challenging many western notions and assumptions. This is especially true in the field of western academia. For many of us, being born *nîhiyaw* means that we are born surrounded by a larger colonial society that, in essence, politicizes us from birth. Like most Indigenous societies, if we want to remain *nîhiyaw* we sometimes have to fight for our rights just to exist in this world as *nîhiyawak*.

³¹ Defined in the opening story as 'paying absolute attention with all senses and intuition'.

³² By a 'practising *nîhiyaw*' I mean someone who follows the *wihkaskomîskanâs* 'sweetgrass trail' and ceremonial customs and protocols or one attempting to live by the *nîhiyaw* values, principles, laws and customs. In layman terms, it is someone who 'walks the talk'.

Speaking and thinking in nîhiyawîwin is a right of intellectual freedom and an act of self-determination. It is not just a form of 'resistance' but empowerment in action and a proclamation (or reclamation) of our birthright. The elders of my youth used a phrase whenever they doubted the insincerity of someone's words, *konta wiya ôma pîkiskowin*, which literally translates as, 'this talk is for nothing'. It was their way of expressing the belief that actions speak louder than words. It is a sentiment I carry in trying to live as a nîhiyaw thinking person in a sometimes overwhelming and increasingly domineering western world.

Prior to my in-person interviews, which took place in Edmonton AB in June 2014, I prepared with ceremony in the hopes that both the research and interactions be guided. I do not believe these highly personal reflections should be explained as part of the formal research process. In my childhood training and in my time as an *oskâpîw* I learned to not speak openly about personal deities or even to share my ceremonial name outside of a proper context and I remain loyal to these teachings. Preparation ceremonies are already an integral part of my belief system and I simply allowed my research to be integrated into this process.

Elders steeped in nîhiyaw ways of knowing are often intuitive, relying on dreams, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, attitudes, emotions, mannerisms, personas and other verbal and non-verbal cues and energies. They employ the nîhiyaw concept of *môsihtâwin* as explained in the opening story.³³ I knew I had to approach these individuals with sincerity and as a fellow nîhiyaw speaker. My approach was as a member of the nîhiyaw speaking family and not as a

³³ Translated in the opening story as 'becoming suddenly aware of something with the use of all senses'

representative of an academic institution. This is partly why each face-to-face meeting was started with a standard nîhiyaw protocol of a tobacco offering. As a former oskâpîw, 'ceremonial/spiritual apprentice and helper', I was trained to petition with tobacco and to explain what it was that I needed from the person I was asking help from.³⁴ This is a way that acknowledges not just the petitioned one's expertise but also that the petitioner is coming from a position of humility. In this process the petitioned person, after hearing out the request, has the option of refusing the tobacco if they either believe they cannot help or that the request is not coming from a 'good' place. The tobacco is essentially a sign of respect to the spirits that will be called upon to guide the process. Upon acceptance of the tobacco, the process is now recognized as sacred and inclusive of the nîhiyaw spirit realm. The tobacco initially offered can then be re-offered or used in related ceremonies. The uninitiated often mistakenly assume that the tobacco is a gift directly to the person being petitioned but it is really a gift to acknowledge the called upon spirits. It is the formalization of a spiritual agreement or negotiation and a doorway to further discussions. To offer tobacco without this knowledge means to risk offering it without a proper context. Acceptance of a tobacco offering usually also means that sacred information in particular can be discussed but elders will usually make it clear what can and cannot be recorded.

Once interview participants accepted my tobacco offering, I believe they recognized my study as part of a larger context. They certainly became more open

³⁴ This is just one version as nîhiyaw protocol ceremonies vary from region to region or from one faith-keeper to the next. Some ceremonies require prayer flags or a small gift but the ceremonies represent many of the same ideas.

and relaxed and gave of their time quite generously. The use of humour and shared stories of community and family connections was another factor in breaking the ice and putting people at ease. This is all part of the relationship building that is essential to establishing a successful rapport with elders and nîhiyawîwin speakers. In an ideal situation, this relationship building would require time but since we all had limited time and since my research was self-funded, we had to make maximum use of our window of opportunity for I could not afford to spend more than a week in Alberta. I hope to pursue post-thesis relationships with all interview participants and am always interested in the language work they are involved in.

The main purpose of the interviews was to identify nîhiyawîwin terms, concepts and teachings related to worldview. In doing so I was fully conscious of the fact that nîhiyawîwin has been already influenced to some degree by Christianity, pan-Indianism and the English language and mindset so I was upfront about this in my conversations with participants and included this as a question in the interview tool. For the in-person interviews, I ended up using a questionnaire (see Appendix B) simply as a guide for deeper conversations because it can be very awkward and culturally inappropriate to engage elders in a contrived process that limits responses. Since the connection with and level of comfort of participants was extremely important and would likely determine the level and quality of information shared by them, it was important for me to frame these interviews as discussions rather than as simply a search for empirical data. Most interviews took place in a mixture of nîhiyawîwin and English and I would translate and transcribe by hand during the conversations, having participants pause or repeat when

necessary so that I could also make additional notes. At the end of each question or area addressed I would read back my translations to ensure I captured the essence of what they were saying before moving on. It is my opinion that participants preferred this process to audio-visual recording equipment, which can be cumbersome and highly formal. I sought the participation of most of the participants well in advance in order that they would have time to think about the kind of questions I would be asking. After I enlisted the participation of a core group of participants, I used a snowball process, taking some of their recommendations for further interviews. Unfortunately, two other highly fluent elders that expressed an interest in the project had unexpected commitments and were not available for in-person interviews during my time in Edmonton. I did not follow up with phone calls because I know that these are elders that will not discuss cultural issues over the phone and without proper initial protocol.

Limitations and Strengths of the Questionnaire

The main drawback of questionnaires, especially online ones, is that they do not suit the *nîhiyaw* way of communicating, especially with elders. In retrospect, there were many shortcomings in the questionnaire. First, the research was initially designed to place practitioners and elders in two separate groups for interviews but this simply was not feasible. Busy people generally don't have a lot of time and energy to expend in helping someone else's research, especially to a stranger who is parachuting in. It also became clear that there is no clear line differentiating an elder from a practitioner. In this case, it turned out well because I recognized many

participants as both elders and language practitioners thereby negating the need for two groups.

Another shortcoming was my choice of wording in certain questions as there was much overlap and participants found themselves repeating answers. This is also partly because of the way nîhiyawîwin interconnects worldview, cosmology, sacred terms, and values, the primary domains on which I designed my questions.

Conducting in person interviews allowed me to steer conversations in a manner that avoided unnecessary repetition but the same could not be said for online participants.

Another drawback was that the wording in some of the questions was simply not clear enough, leaving too much room for misinterpretation. For instance question one, *what are five words to represent Cree worldview to a non-speaker?* was very awkwardly worded and open to broad interpretation. The question was too abstract. Asking participants to identify three or five or any number of words is also too prescriptive and can be seen as contrived or random. Questions one, two, three, and six all had prescriptive numbers attached, which is far too many. A question such as, *what five values (virtues) best describe traditional Cree character and how are these values exemplified?* is far too layered, complicated and confusing. In retrospect, when I was designing the tool I was using my môtinyâw mâmitonihcikan 'western ways of thinking' and forgetting to frame the questions for nîhiyawîwin speakers because I was too worried about meeting ethics requirements and academic expectations. I regret not filtering the language more carefully. Ironically, one of the strengths of the overlapping nature of the questions was that most angles

were covered because every question focused right back on obtaining information related to aspects of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin.

Despite their shortcomings, the questions I found most useful in the questionnaire were question three on identifying nîhiyaw values, question five on describing nîhiyawîwin structure, and questions seven and eight that were designed to identify words falling out of use. Questions seven and eight probably should have been merged into a single question but that's in retrospect. All in all, these four questions provided me with the most relevant bulk of information needed for this study. Unfortunately, the results from question six on identifying nîhiyaw proverbs could not be included in my results due to lack of time and space. I had to focus on my main goals and made the decision to omit this information. Since some of these proverbs would have been made accessible to the public and would look good on t-shirts and posters, maybe it was for the best.

Some questions I wished I had included in the questionnaire would be along the lines of:

- Who are the key elders and practitioners in Western Canada most familiar with old nîhiyaw concepts and high Cree?
- What strategies would you recommend for the protection of sacred terms?

The in-person interviews, while still tackling the primary original questions, had more flexibility in allowing the speakers to answer in both English and nîhiyawîwin, and to give more focus on the areas they felt more comfortable with. These discussion-based interviews created a level of comfort and familiarity. This allowed

a variety of additional issues related to language and cultural revitalization to be addressed through some open-ended questions and volunteer answers.

The Participants

There were a total of nine (9) research participants, of which four (4) were interviewed in-person. The additional five (5) participants completed an online questionnaire. Of these participants, a total of seven (7) are from Alberta Cree territory and speakers of the Plains dialect. Two participants are from Manitoba and while one is a Woodland speaker, both are familiar with the Woodland and Plains dialects since their work involves both dialects. Most participants are in their fifties and sixties and one, Leslie Skinner, is an adult in his early thirties who learned the language beginning in his teen years.

Sharing knowledge considered by most to be highly personal and sensitive normally requires a relationship and trust building process but because of distance, costs and availabilities, this was not possible on this project. Fortunately the participants are not just specialists, linguists and faith-keepers, most are professional language practitioners comfortable in both English and nîhiyawîwin and they shared of their knowledge freely. I honour them as individuals and the work that they all do. The participants all agreed that their anonymity was not necessary, especially since some of them have collaborated on projects, are familiar with each other's work or otherwise interact with one another. I will list them in the following two categories:

Online Participants:

Wayne Jackson, Billy Joe Laboucan, Leslie Skinner, Solomon Ratt, Arok Wolvengrey

Interview/Discussion Participants:

Mary Cardinal-Collins, Reuben Quinn, Dorothy Thunder, Rose Wabasca

Participants are largely professional nîhiyawîwin practitioners such as curriculum writers and instructors, with one of them being a non-native linguist who learned nîhiyawîwin as an adult. Some of the participants are primary writers and contributors to the standard Cree dictionaries and resources now used throughout Western Canada. Some participants, in addition to their language revitalization work, are recognized as elders and traditional knowledge keepers both in their own communities and also in the broader Cree community. Only two participants were not currently working as practitioners. Of these, one is a respected and highly fluent elder and ceremonialist and the other is a highly motivated full-time language learner who has reached a conversational level of nîhiyawîwin. The participants represent a good cross section of respected language speakers with a working knowledge of nîhiyawîwin and nîhiyaw worldview. These individuals were identified because of their expertise, experience and active involvement in language and cultural revitalization.

Prior to the research I had only met two of the participants in person (Billy Joe Laboucan and Rose Wabasca) but I had interacted with all other participants online through the Facebook group *Nêhiyawêwin (Cree) Word/Phrase of the Day*,

which is administered by one of the participants, Wayne Jackson. While I did not get a chance to meet directly with the Manitoba participants Solomon Ratt and Arok Wolvengrey, I have also interacted with them online and am very familiar with the language resources they have developed. I am honoured that all of the participants took the time to contribute and add their voices to this research in the spirit of *mâmahkâmâtowin*, 'working collaboratively and cooperatively in helpfulness' and *sihtoskâtowin*, 'joining together to strengthen and support one another'.

Intellectual feathers sometimes get ruffled during critical discussions but the *nîhiyaw* style is based on respectful communication approaches. In my opinion, formal dialogue on language and cultural survival is more crucial now than ever. These critical discussions should not disconnect us. According to the teachings of *nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin*, despite any differences people may have, our *nîhiyawîwin* language still connects us all as family. As long as our language is alive, this will always be the case.

CHAPTER FOUR: Voices From the Mîkowahp

It is important to learn Cree and to live it every day rather than just to simply try to learn the language by itself. Cree culture is a lifestyle and belief system. When this lifestyle is followed it brings wellness and balance to individuals and provides them with a sense of identity. Culture and language are intertwined.

—R. Wabasca, personal interview, June 3rd, 2014

The word mîkowahp in the chapter title means ‘tepee’ or ‘lodge’ and represents a safe, comfortable place in our own nîhiyaw environment. With the warmth of its central fire, the protective medicine bundle hanging near the back of the lodge, the soft nîhiyawîwin words of elders floating on the inside and children’s laughter just outside, we can be free to be ourselves in a rapidly changing world that seems to be drifting away from itself. Supporting the spirit of Rose Wabasca’s words in the above quote, the mîkowahp can be a powerful metaphor representing a place of refuge. It is in this nest that sacred terms can be respectfully explored among fellow speakers. Outsiders and learners at all levels are welcome into this sacred space, but they must recognize that they are entering another world. There are worldview and cosmology teachings embedded in the language and learning to think through nîhiyaw tâpisiwin is necessary in order to fully grasp nîhiyawîwin. All who enter must find their own spot on the ground and it may not be next to the fire. Nîhiyawîwin grammar and structure can be analyzed through a western cognitive lens but this does not lead to a full understanding of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. The mîkowahp is not a place for demands to be made but a place for allowing teachings to naturally unfold. In describing the nîhiyaw term piyaktikimowin ‘a

calm, steady patience' as a requirement for learning nîhiyawîwin, research

participant Dorothy Thunder states:

Today our people want to learn fast to gain the understandings that took others years to learn but they (those others) did it carefully – they have a good understanding of the Cree worldview. One needs to have the patience in gaining an understanding of derivations of concepts and terms. We have to learn our language in a respectful manner. (D. Thunder, personal interview, May 27th, 2014)

This is a valuable reminder that although the mîkowahp is a safe and inclusive space, it can also be a challenging one that requires a patient, respectful and holistic approach to gaining knowledge.

This chapter examines the results of the research with nîhiyawîwin practitioners but I will also draw on my own experiences as a nîhiyawîwin practitioner and life-long learner. Interviews and an online questionnaire with language practitioners focused on nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin, nîhiyaw cosmology, nîhiyaw values, characteristics of nîhiyawîwin including language structure, sacred words falling out of use, and nîhiyaw forms of prayer. I will summarize practitioner responses and provide some analysis.

To provide a general overview of issues most directly related to this study, most participants in their responses:

- Identified the need for providing cultural context in translating nîhiyawîwin terms and to pass on proper holistic cultural concepts and teachings to new learners.

- Stated that nîhiyawîwin is a complex and highly spiritual language that is completely intertwined with culture and worldview and that the language has to be taught with this as a foundational understanding.
- Expressed strong views that nîhiyawîwin was beginning to get filtered through English language frameworks and mîniyâw mâmitonihcikanîwin or 'western thinking'.

What The Research Taught Me

Through analysis of morphemes from nîhiyawîwin words arising from the interviews with research participants, I have learned more about the complexities of nîhiyawîwin grammatical structure. I have also learned more about how much nîhiyawîwin relies on metaphor, multiple layers of implied meanings, and how much overlap there is in between the meanings of values and laws. I am more aware of the slight variations in meanings of terms between dialects. I have always known nîhiyawîwin to be imbued with levels of meaning but after sifting through participant responses, I am struck with just how profoundly interrelated everything is in the nîhiyaw world. I am not sure if I have the words to convey this holistic paradigm but I will do my best. I am convinced that the language shapes not just the beliefs of fluent speakers but that it shapes us all in a number of ways including our attitudes, character and our thinking. I have been very humbled and also very inspired to keep on absorbing information and reaching new levels of comprehension and understanding of terms and concepts. This will help me in my

work as a language teacher, curriculum writer and in my everyday language use. I am happy to do my part in gathering firewood for the mîkowahp fire.

Before we examine sacred terms and concepts related to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin, I will follow up on the nîhiyawîwin structure that was introduced in chapter two by focusing here on what research participants, some of the current practitioners in the field, have to say about structure. I will focus on key features to avoid getting hung up on nîhiyawîwin grammar, which can be very technical.

Insights on Nîhiyawîwin Structure

In providing an overview of nîhiyawîwin structural characteristics participants used descriptors such as verb-based, relational, descriptive, fluid and flexible, animate-inanimate classified, polysynthetic, conjugated, and inventive. These observations are consistent with the structural characteristics described in all of the literature on nîhiyawîwin structure.

Based on responses, one of the biggest features in nîhiyawîwin is the animate-inanimate classification of nouns, which pervades the grammatical structure. All animals and creatures including the smallest insects are considered animate. Most entities with a life force such as trees and many plants are considered animate but most grasses and the soil are not. Most rocks, typically seen by Westerners as inanimate, are considered animate and some types of rocks are considered more sacred than others. Rocks used in the sweatlodge ceremony are considered manifestations of kisînapîwasiniy or 'kind man rock,' an important cosmological deity. These rocks are therefore referred to as 'the grandfathers.' Being

a living or life giving entity is one of the criteria for animate noun classification but this is not the only determining factor. Items like certain body parts, clothing articles, and even certain foods are also considered animate. The rules of animate nouns are complex and they may vary slightly between dialects. There are likely historic and cosmological reasons for some of these distinctions. In his article “Animate and Inanimate: the Cree Nehinuw view”, Goulet provides the most comprehensive explanation of these distinctions that I have ever seen in written format (2008, p. 7-19).

Another key feature is the polysynthetic aspect of nîhiyawîwin as research participant Wayne Jackson describes, “Understand that Cree is not English and that learning Cree through English is difficult because the translations are never word for word. Cree is a polysynthetic language, words are comprised of little units of meaning” (W. Jackson, online survey, May 2014). This would make it difficult for a dictionary designed around an English language framework to accurately translate many nîhiyawîwin terms.

Most respondents also described nîhiyawîwin as a verb-based language. This means that the verb is the main feature of most sentences, often containing most of the information in a sentence. In fact, one verb can make up an entire proper sentence i.e. nîkîwâpimâwak, ‘I saw them’. Here the root is wâpi ‘to see’. The prefix nîkî indicates past tense and a first person participant. The mâw indicates seeing someone else (third person). The suffix ‘ak’ indicates that it was more than one person or animate being. All of this information comes from this one word sentence. Many nouns stem from verbs and are considered partial verbs. Nîhiyawîwin is an

action-oriented language and so reliant on verbs that even colours are verbs. For example *mihkwâw*, the name for the colour 'red' does not simply mean red. This short single word translates as, 'it is being of a blood-like appearance' indicating action and a descriptiveness to the language. *Nîhiyawîwin* colours are also classified into animate and inanimate classes and stand as complete sentences even as single words. They have literal and implied meanings that can be difficult to translate into English. The inanimate word for the colour white is *wâpiskâw*, a single word which means, 'It is being the colour of the dawn' or more accurately, 'It is being of a dawn-like appearance.' This implies the brightness or clearness of the dawn even though there is no morpheme to reflect this. The inanimate word for green is *askihtakwâw*, which can mean, 'It is being the color of the land or the earth' or 'It is being of an earth-like appearance.' Once again, although there is no morpheme to indicate such, there is a built-in implication that *askihtakwâw* would further mean, 'It is being of a summer-like appearance.' This is poetic when compared to a language where a colour is simply a colour.

There is no gender classification in *nîhiyawîwin* structure. In other words there are no words for 'he' or 'she'. There is no way to say, 'he or she went to the ceremony' because the he and she are considered the same. This is why transcribers spell this out in English as 'he/she'. Obviously *nîhiyaw* society is not exempt from issues of gender inequality and patriarchy but to what degree have these issues been shaped by colonial influence? While there have always been gender roles in *nîhiyaw* society there was also much fluidity. Perhaps this grammatical lack of

gender distinction reflects an older worldview where gender differentiation was not viewed as important as it is today.

To expand on the descriptive nature of *nîhiyawîwin*, words can often paint a picture and new words can be created if they make sense and follow the grammatical patterns. For example, let's examine *mistatim*, the *nîhiyaw* word for horse. The prefix 'mis' is an indicator of bigness but the root noun 'atim' actually means 'dog'. The word tells us that there was no original word for horse and that since the new creatures looked like big versions of dogs (which were used for packing, hauling and other work at the time), horses became the 'big dogs' and a new word was created that became an important part of Plains Cree culture and spirituality. The horse spirit entered the *nîhiyaw* psyche and cosmological order, which in turn led to horse-specific ceremonies. Today nobody thinks of the horse as a big dog despite the etymology of this word. Research participant Rose Wabasca expands on the descriptive nature of *nîhiyawîwin*:

Cree is descriptive and the orality of it takes listeners to places. The humour is funnier in Cree and the stories can transport you like you are really there in the place within the story. It is more meaningful. *Âwiyak kâ âtayohkît*-- the telling of sacred stories—especially places the listener directly in the story. (R. Wabasca, personal interview, June 3rd, 2014)

Another example of the poetic nature of *nîhiyawîwin* can be found in the way that female elders often speak in diminutive terms. For example, a usual way to invite someone to a meal is to say, *piy mîciso*, meaning 'come and eat'. The diminutive form is, *piy mîcisosî*, which translates roughly as, 'come and have a little bit of something to eat'. This use of this language form implies a tenderness, humility and affection on the part of the elder. Further, this specific example also

implies that the elder is not serving a grand feast but making a polite and humble offering. It represents a safe and comfortable kohkom 'grandmother' energy that is reflective of the mîkowahp metaphor described at the beginning of this chapter.

Nîhiyaw Perspectives in Translations

Based on the above overview, and on the literature review in chapter two, it's safe to say that nîhiyawîwin grammar presents some challenges in translating terms and concepts into English. This is especially true if we want translations to accurately reflect the full nîhiyaw meaning of words. The language reflects an ongoing series of integrated and interrelated concepts that are difficult to view in isolation. There are many implied meanings in nîhiyawîwin terms and some words are actually a complex series of morphemes, making them more tedious to translate.

In my work as practitioner I have found it useful to identify the closest English meanings from a variety of angles including denotative, connotative and other implied meanings. Using this process allows a deeper appreciation of nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin and allows learners a glimpse into the vast meanings of certain nîhiyawîwin terms. Some practitioners struggle with explaining terms out of context to new learners. I would agree that context is essential but add that implied meanings especially of nîhiyawîwin sacred or cosmological terms should never be ignored. Our goal in translating should be to capture the spirit and essence of a concept. In his word for word interpretation on a text written by Elder Louie Sunchild, Walter Lightning provides some examples of how this can be done. In his breakdown Lightning uses a three-column format including guiding notes to help

readers understand implied meanings (1992, p. 33-60). I would propose that nîhiyaw terms could also be more accurately translated into English by applying some or all of the following:

1. Providing the common translation i.e. ayapihkîs describes a spider.
2. Providing the literal translation i.e. ayapihkîs means net maker.
3. Providing translation of the root words i.e. ayapiy means net.
4. Providing translation of relevant morphemes and affixes i.e. kîs signifies a builder or maker of things.
5. Providing information on any hidden, connotative or implied meanings i.e. nîhiyawak catch fish in similar ways that ayapihkîs catches his/her food (catching it with a net).
6. I would also add the origin or etymology of a word whenever it is possible to do so including its cosmological significance i.e. an âtayohkîwin or teaching story like the one where ayapihkîs lets people down to the earth on his/her string.³⁵ Depending on the purpose and goals of a dictionary, this is an opportunity to explain the character, nature, spiritual role and 'mythology' surrounding a particular term. This is where the question, 'how much information can be appropriately shared?' has to be addressed by language resource developers.

In essence, the format I am describing here is very similar to a topical encyclopaedic dictionary. Translators using English frameworks for nîhiyawîwin have to accept the fact that equivalent English terms often fall short of capturing the essence of

³⁵ To save confusion, in this context âtayohkîwin is the singular version of âtayohkîwina.

nîhiyaw concepts. Kihciyimitowin is not the same as the English word 'respect' because the prefix kihci implies sacredness to this concept. The word kisiyinow does not simply mean 'old man' but something far more special for the prefix kisî is the root for the word used for kindness. The word kisiyinow describes a person who has reached a place of worthiness in life and that they are recognized as kind, gentle and loving. The word kisîwâtisowin does not simply mean 'kindness'; it describes a state of ultimate compassion, gentleness and grace. Sometimes the differences are just subtle nuances i.e. the word tatawâw does not quite mean 'welcome' as often used. Tatawâw or tawâw can be used to signify an invitation but it really means, 'it is open' or, 'there is space' or even, 'the ground is yours'. It is important to acknowledge subtle nuances if the goals are accurate and full translations.

Many nîhiyawîwin terms and concepts and their implied meanings can be profound and beautiful. Like many other world languages already do, it's time to start reflecting that unique beauty. In my opinion, it's time to properly capture the magical and poetic qualities of nîhiyawîwin and start celebrating these qualities. To return to our metaphor, in sharing these qualities we are opening the door to the mîkowahp, adding a log to the fire and saying, astam pihtikwiw piy ayapi...'come inside and take a seat'.

The Overlapping Trails to Nîhiyaw Tâpisiwin

As already pointed out throughout this thesis, in nîhiyaw thinking there is much overlap between nîhiyaw worldview, cosmology, values, philosophy and even traditional laws. It is not surprising that research participants had overlapping

responses to questions related to these factors. On the whole, participant responses supported many of the observations of the literature review in chapter two. In describing the characteristics of nîhiyaw worldview and philosophy as a response to the broad opening questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix B), the information shared by participants appears as macro-level information. I am framing these responses as broad domains of information or entry points in understanding nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin. In identifying these broad domains for understanding nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin the most common answers from the practitioners were:

Nîhiyaw pimâtisowin – ‘the nîhiyaw life or lifestyle’

Nîhiyaw sihcikîwina – ‘the nîhiyaw ways of doings things’

Nîhiyawiwhtwâwina – ‘the traditional nîhiyaw teachings or sayings’

Nîhiyaw kiskihtamowina – ‘nîhiyaw knowledges’

Nîhiyaw mâmitonihcikanîwin – ‘nîhiyaw mindedness’

On the surface, the English translations of these nîhiyawîwin concepts above, while brief, still indicate some degree of overlap in meanings. To a fluent speaker who understands the meanings of these terms at a deep nîhiyaw level, this overlap in meaning is even more profound even though there are also differences in meaning between individual terms. This is the integrated nature of nîhiyawîwin. When one speaks of values, they are also sometimes speaking of laws. When one speaks of culture they are also speaking of nîhiyaw mindedness. This overlap in meaning is especially evident in many of the nîhiyaw terms for values described below.³⁶ From

³⁶ I use the word ‘values’ for lack of a better English one. In nîhiyawîwin we could use a number of other words here including the terms for ‘nîhiyaw ways’, ‘nîhiyaw thinking’, ‘nîhiyaw knowledge’, ‘nîhiyaw teachings’ etc. This gives some idea of the overlap in meanings I have been describing.

this part of the chapter onward I will begin to highlight key nîhiyawîwin terms and highlight some of them initially in bold font.

Key Nîhiyaw Values and Principles

The Cree vernacular is changing. Cree laws such as manâcîtowin, sâkîtowin, tapahtiyimisowin and kihciyimitowin are now becoming described as virtues or values. These teachings, along with the language, are getting watered down. (R. Quinn, personal interview May 26th, 2014)

As Reuben Quinn points out, it's important to remember that not only can languages change or become 'watered down' but that what many describe as values are actually nîhiyaw laws or guiding principles (personal interview, May 26th, 2014). Some elders refer to these as natural laws and they are believed to have come from higher orders of life within the nîhiyaw cosmology. In her interview for this thesis research, Mary Cardinal-Collins points to the holistic nature of nîhiyawîwin, "all of our values are interconnected" (personal interview, May 28th, 2014). To describe this further there are many overlapping meanings and subtle nuances between terms like **wahkôtowin** 'relatedness or interrelatedness', **miyo-wîcihtowin** 'getting along well' and **sihtoskâtowin** 'supporting and pulling together to strengthen each other'. There is also overlap in meanings between concepts like **manâcîtowin** 'mercy, compassion, respect or mitigation', **kisîwâtisowin** 'a gentle, loving kindness', **kitimâkiyimitowin** 'pity or ultimate empathy' and **sâkîtowin** 'love'.

Participants described all of these above values and principles as important but the concepts that were most consistently identified were **tapahtîmisowin**, a form of humility roughly implying, 'to never think higher of yourself than others'

and **kihciyimitowin** ‘an ultimate, sacred-like respectful thought for one another’. I think participants would agree that humility and respect are foundational principles of nîhiyaw culture. Because such concepts can help in understanding nîhiyaw tâpisiwin, they are key to this study. I will now further break down some identified nîhiyaw concepts pertaining to values and principles to provide fuller meanings:

- **Manâcîtowin:** The animate root of this term is manâciy and is a command meaning, ‘to have mercy, compassion or respect’, and, ‘to protect one another’. It is a very important term very closely related to the concepts kihciyimitowin and kitimâkiyimitowin.³⁷ It forms an aspect of another central nîhiyaw concept wahkôtowin (described below), which many believe to be one of the sacred natural laws observed by nîhiyawak.

- **Manâcihtâwin:** Sometimes spelled manâtisowin, this is similar to the above concept but the inanimate root manacihtâ can also take on other meanings such as, ‘to mitigate or conserve something for the future’. (Notice the various fluid but related meanings that these concepts can have). The concepts manâcîtowin and manâcihtâwin are similar to the Buddhist concept of ‘no harm’.

- **Iyinîsowin:** This is a concept that Solomon Ratt (online survey, May 2014) describes as ‘wisdom given by the Creator’ but it also commonly means

³⁷ It is important to explain the suffix *-owin* because I am using it so prominently in this chapter. Since nîhiyawîwin is so verb dominated and inclusive of participants, the suffix *-owin* has to be added to make a word more noun-like and generic. Depending on the context, words ending in *-owin* can be similar to the way that the English suffix *-tion* changes a word to mean ‘the act of doing or being’.

‘intelligence’, indicating that there is little distinction between these two concepts. It can be defined as ‘smart, astute, and wise beyond one’s years’ and can also describe someone who is a fast or natural learner. This concept of intelligence tempered with wisdom is likely a concept that would have helped to guide and inform nîhiyaw intellectual traditions.

- **Kihciyimitowin:** Mentioned above as being related to manâcîtowin, the root kihci represents a sacredness or larger than life greatness as in the term kihcimanitow ‘great spirit’. The morpheme iyim represents how one’s mind views someone else. The suffix –owin is described in fn 37. The full meaning then is ‘the act of thinking sacredly about others’. There is a built in recognition that everyone has a soul and a god-given life. It is a form of pure mutual respect. One can only imagine a world where humans recognized the sacredness in each other and treated each other accordingly. There are some dialectical variations of this term.

- **Kitimâkiyimitowin:** The root as I understand it is kitimâk meaning, ‘empathy, mercy, compassion or pity’. A more fluent speaker could likely break this root down further. As I’ve already touched on, iyim is the way we think of others. This term can be translated then as ‘thinking of one another with compassion and mercy’. Variations of this concept are often used to describe those moments of genuine compassion towards someone else’s suffering that are so heartfelt that one is immediately moved to tears. Related concepts are miyowîcihtowin, ‘being in togetherness or relatedness’.

• **Sâkiyitowin:** The root sâki represents love in general and the term in its full form means roughly, 'having love for one another'. The nîhiyaw concept of love as far as I understand it is not much different from the English meaning of love but research participants do point to its importance by almost unanimously identifying it as a key concept. I have also heard elders that have been teachers in my life speak of sâkiyitowin more as a sacred law than as a virtue. Two of the research participants also supported this theory in their comments. In this context, sâkiyitowin is closely related to wahkôtowin (described below) and would have been used to guide nîhiyaw social organization and kinship. It likely also describes love in its broadest relational sense. It describes a deep reciprocal connection not just to humans but also to other aspects of the universe.

• **Tapahtiyimisowin:** This word represents a form of true humility and modesty and means something along the lines of, 'not thinking too highly of one's self'. The generic, non-inclusive noun version would be tapahtiyimowin but the ending – iyimisowin, signifies, how 'we think of ourselves', making the word more personal. The root comes from tapahti, which is a preposition meaning, 'on the lower side of other things' i.e. the lower branches of a tree that are closer to the earth. There were many stories in my childhood about the importance of this concept. Based on these stories and on the nîhiyawîwin proverbs/idioms I was raised with, these concepts have been deeply ingrained as guiding principles in my personal life. Nîhiyawîwin advocate and practitioner Wayne Jackson describes the nîhiyaw view on boasting as one of the lessons related to this concept:

Humility...to be humble and go about doing what you do best without having to say, "I'm great, look at me." People will recognize your talents and accomplishments without you having to boast or brag about it.
(W. Jackson, online survey, May 2014)

Leslie Skinner, described *tapahiyimisowin* in *nîhiyawîwin* by writing his response to the online questionnaire in SRO. His rough English translation is:

So (this means) nobody can boast or overstep with their words and nobody can coerce or control another. There is absolute respect for personal autonomy and boundaries. Our leaders were always examples of humility and compassion. (L. Skinner, online survey, June 2014)

This view of humility can have many profound implications in all areas of modern life. In terms of leadership it stands in stark contrast to the political realities of the modern world that tend to reward individuality, person gain, competition and even boasting and aggression. The whole concept of campaigns based on attack ads, boasting, political grandstanding and election promises are adopted concepts and not part of the traditional *nîhiyaw* mindset. Even though modern *nîhiyawak* and most colonially established First Nation governments adhere to this municipal style of government in order to get program funding, many traditionalists see these power-based approaches as extensions of a colonial agenda that works to diminish indigenous institutions and jurisdictions. Many young activists through the Idle No More movement and other political campaigns have begun to challenge these elected leaders to return to more traditional *nîhiyaw* governance models.

- **Wahkôtowin:** This concept translates to 'relatedness or interrelatedness'. An underlying assumption of this kind of relatedness is that it signifies a kinship not just to humans but also to all other living entities and spirit beings. This word

reflects the constant reminder of nîhiyaw reciprocity and the importance of sharing as expressed by practitioner Wayne Jackson:

Sharing and helping one another – We were poor but always treated our guests with the utmost respect and welcome to our home even though we never had much to share. Community members and family were there for each other when anyone was in need. (W. Jackson, online survey, May 2014)

Wahkôtowin has implications beyond responsibilities to humans. Many âtayohkîwina and teaching stories are about marriages, births and transformations between human and animal worlds and they speak of times when animals and humans spoke the same language. Practitioner and storyteller Billy Joe Laboucan states:

Cree language recognizes that we are (part of) a web of life; that we belong in the world as interconnected beings, not as masters of the world. (B.J. Laboucan, online survey, June 2014)

This concept of far-reaching kinship is, in some ways, similar to pantheism in that it recognizes the sacred in all life forms. These nîhiyaw principles described above are just a sampling; they do not represent all nîhiyaw values and laws. They do, however, provide some insights into nîhiyaw philosophy and nîhiyaw tâpisiwin.

Reuben Quinn is of the view that many of what are described as values, are actually laws (personal interview May 26th, 2014). Many traditionalists see wahkôtowin as a natural law. As a law, there would have been a great sense of personal responsibility to live by the teachings of wahkôtowin. It would not simply have been a personal choice in the pre-colonial nîhiyaw world but carried out as a life-long task and reinforced by the entire community.

In revisiting these concepts through my thesis research I am humbly reminded that I continue to have much to learn about the values embedded in

nîhiyawîwin. I am reminded of the poetic and creative use of many implied meanings and metaphors. The next subsection explains just how important sacred concepts are to nîhiyaw cosmology and in turn, how important nîhiyaw cosmology is to understanding the language.

Dances with Cosmology

Cree cosmology is not just deity figures, but the sacred creations stories of how everything is the way it is. There are teachings of the sky, sun, moon, stars, seasons and mahihkan mîskanaw... the Milky Way.
(S. Ratt, online survey, May 2014)

In addition to values, principles and laws, participants identify ceremony and cosmology as important to understanding nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin. To fully appreciate the language, one must particularly be conscientious of the way that cosmological teachings are always just under the surface of everyday nîhiyawîwin use.

Nîhiyawîwin is a soft, flowing language that can sound melodic. To a fluent speaker familiar with nîhiyaw teachings and basic language structure, nîhiyawîwin is like a dance between the practical and the sacred. As described in the introductory story of this thesis, an example of a common mistranslation from nîhiyawîwin to English is the word piyisiwak. While nîhiyawîwin dictionaries and many fluent speakers would translate piyisiwak as ‘thunder’, the literal translation of piyisiwak is, ‘thunderbirds’ or ‘thunder beings’. It is a pluralized word that comes from the phrase piyisiwak î kahkitowak, which literally means ‘the thunderbirds are calling out to one another’. From the nîhiyaw worldview the sound of thunder is created by the call of the thunderbirds or thunder beings. It conveys an immediate connection to a spiritual realm in nîhiyaw cosmology. This fuller translation provides readers

with a more accurate and deeper understanding of piyisiwak, and draws attention to related concepts such as the âtayohkîwina ‘sacred historical narratives of cosmological beings’, which describe our place in the universe. The piyisiwak are important cosmological figures described in the âtayohkîwina and are key deities in many ceremonies. Knowing the real meaning of piyisiwak automatically signifies a worldview that is different from the western paradigm. Perhaps this why nîhiyawîwin speakers simply translate it as ‘thunder’, for the cosmological significance of the real concept simply cannot be summarized or easily grasped, especially by someone from a different worldview.

McLeod describes âtayohkîwina as a Cree spiritual history (2007, pp.17-18). It is hard to understand piyisiwak without also having a basic understanding of âtayohkîwina or nîhiyaw spiritual beliefs. Without this basic background knowledge there is no context for the translation. Research participant Dorothy Thunder describes this sentiment for a holistic approach to language learning:

...Be careful in learning and understanding that our language is a sacred living entity. It’s not just a matter of memorizing what the key words are but the richness and beauty of the language has to stay intact. This is what was given to us as nîhiyawak; our ways of life---to listen, to observe and to learn---we didn’t just write things down and memorize terms. It’s gaining the understanding that is passed onto us by our elders... everything has a context. We have to be mindful of the real meaning of words. The language has to come from the heart. Cree is a language of the heart. (D. Thunder, personal interview, May 27th, 2014)

As in the above example, a nîhiyaw phrase to describe northern lights can easily be misrepresented. While the single verb wâwahtîwa describes the occurrence of northern lights, a more common phrase is, î-nîmihtowak, which literally means, ‘they are dancing’ (referring to the spirits of the deceased). In other words, the

dancing of departed souls causes the lights in the sky to dance and is a reminder of the ongoing connection between those in the earthly realm and the spirit world. This traditional understanding stems from sacred narratives that are part of the âtayohkîwina and nîhiyaw cosmology. This example demonstrates the importance of denotative and connotative understandings. These translation issues in general also demonstrate the connectedness between nîhiyawîwin and nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin. They speak to the importance of representing nîhiyawîwin as accurately possible. It is an argument for providing a richer and fuller context than is normally provided in translating nîhiyaw concepts to the larger world. In describing the philosophy behind nîhiyawîwin, practitioner Reuben Quinn offers the following observations:

The language is practical as well as ensuring the spiritual realm. This is what gives life and spirit to the language; this dual understanding between the spiritual and practical. The sacred laws and teachings are combined with the practical and everyday understanding of Cree life. All practical things are imbued and imbedded with spiritual meaning. It is all related. These concepts of relatedness such as 'we are all related' are imbedded in our language. It is abstract and concrete at the same time. (R. Quinn, personal interview, May 26th, 2014)

In addition to being a proficient nîhiyawîwin speaker, Reuben is also a ceremonialist. His views about the language being imbued and imbedded with spiritual meaning are based on a grounded, working knowledge and seem to match a common view of elders and language practitioners that many nîhiyawîwin words have hidden spiritual meanings. It appears that one needs a working understanding of nîhiyawîwin and nîhiyaw beliefs to know what to look for in identifying these meanings.

Varied Meanings of Cosmological Concepts

Research practitioners identified some of the following additional cosmological concepts as important to helping understand nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. I have added some of my own notes on most terms based on common nîhiyaw translations.

Notice their varied meanings:

- **Acahkowin:** This translates to ‘spirit ways’ or ‘spirituality’ as described by a number of practitioners. The root word acahk means, ‘soul or spirit’ and the suffix –owin signifies a state of being. This term reflects the belief that many entities in the nîhiyaw world have souls or spirits. It is a reminder that we ourselves are spirits living a human existence and that our journeys continue when we leave the earthly plane. The nîhiyaw cosmological beliefs around nakataskîwin ‘leaving the earthly existence’ and the after earth-life are highly complicated and describe various spiritual planes and levels of existence. I am not comfortable enough in my own understanding to share more than this about the afterlife nor am I willing to risk breeching of protocol. I will leave it at that. In any case, most research practitioners explicitly state that one cannot understand nîhiyaw tâpisiwin without also gaining some understanding of nîhiyaw spiritual knowledge and specifically, knowledge about the spirits.

• **Kihcikîsikok:** This is a concept of heaven or the traditional place in the nîhiyaw afterlife.³⁸ The literal translation is, 'sacred sky' or 'great sky'. Reuben Quinn believes it hints at the possibility of a Christian influence (personal interview, May 26th, 2014). This view may be supported by the connotation to an upwardly heaven. It's a term to consider for further linguistic etymological research.

• **Mamahtâwisowin:** This is a highly sacred and powerful term that was touched on by almost all practitioners. It is not a term used lightly in many nîhiyaw communities. To properly explain this concept would require an entire workshop. Related English concepts are 'shamanism, sorcery, magic, conjuring, preternatural or supernatural' and other terms that fall short of explaining what this concept really is. In reality mamahtâwisowin can have many aspects of these Western translations but these interpretations are far too simplistic to properly describe it. The root word mamah could stem from the same root in the term mâmaskâtamowin, which describes a state of wonder and amazement, but this will require more research on my part. I never pressed practitioners on this during interviews and it's a term that must be discussed in person. Someone who is gifted with mamahtâwisowin is generally recognized as having spirit guides that can be called upon for a variety of reasons. Ones who have this gift can sometimes alter the natural order: conduct healing, find lost objects, foretell the future, travel through time and space, communicate with animals and other spirits, find game, and control physical and natural elements like the weather, just to name a few abilities. These

³⁸ I have heard it described by some ceremonialists as a Christian concept and others as a nîhiyaw concept.

abilities are what prompted early missionaries (and most contemporary Christians) to label nîhiyaw spirituality as witchcraft or ‘the devil’s work.’ Expanding on the judgments of early missionaries, Reuben Quinn states:

We did not have a God vs. devil concept. We had a paradigm closer to love vs. fear. Our closest concept to sin is pâstahowin, which equates to *shattering one’s future*. (R. Quinn, personal interview, May 26th, 2014)³⁹

There are protocols, laws, social mores and cosmological frameworks that define the rules and limits of mamahtâwisowin. It is a fluid concept that is not easily defined. Typical of nîhiyaw humility, someone who is bestowed with this gift (while considered powerful and revered) is informally described by the phrase, kîkway kâ kiskihita, which translates simply as, ‘he/she who knows something’.

- **Pawâmowin:** I have added this important term because I believe that it is too important to exclude. Translated roughly as, ‘spirit dreaming or dream power’, this practice is another cornerstone of nîhiyaw spiritual life. These are not ordinary dreams but dreams and visits from the pawâkanak, the ‘dream spirit helpers’. Pawâmowin is a process that can transport dreamers into another dimension of space and time. These experiences can be so vivid that detailed instructions, protocols and even entire songs are passed on to the dreamers in such a way that this information is remembered upon awakening. Whereas the spirits known as âtayohkana are deities from the nîhiyaw cosmological circle (that can make their presences felt in ceremonies), it is the pawâkanak that serve more often as personal

³⁹ The literal translation of pâstahowin is, *stepping over*, indicating a breach of boundaries or protocol. The impact that Reuben describes as *shattering one’s future* indicates the deep-rooted nîhiyaw belief in the balancing nature of natural law. Someone who commits a pâstahowin is opening themselves to the forces of balance.

guides. Pawâmowin is one of the primary means by which mamahtâwisowin, the supernatural spiritual power described above, is manifested. Through nîhiyaw kâkîsimowina,⁴⁰ the traditional style of ‘pleading from the heart to the powers that be’, various spirits are recognized and called upon as helpers of kihcimanitow, ‘the Great Spirit’.

Ann Shouting, a Blackfoot ceremonialist who was not interviewed for this project, explains that all formal prayers in her language acknowledge not just the Creator figure but also specific spirits and the ancestors. She describes this as a holistic, inclusive way of praying that recognizes all deities as an interconnected process (A. Shouting, personal communication, August 2001).⁴¹

- **Nistamîmakanak:** This is a term meaning, ‘the ancestors’ or ‘the original people’ (R. Quinn, May 26th, 2014). Like other indigenous people, nîhiyawak maintain a connection to the ancestors through various ceremonies. This term does not describe the âtayohkanak or the pawâkanak and does not represent a form of ancestor worship as has been often assumed by many early western historians, missionaries, anthropologists and explorers. Similarly to the nîhiyaw reverence for elders, however, the term does reflect a deep respect for ancestors as they are often described by the phrase, ‘those who have walked the path before us so that we could

⁴⁰ This is the plural version of kâkîsimowin.

⁴¹ Blackfoot is from the same linguistic family as nîhiyawîwin and since I have had to learn Blackfoot prayer songs I can personally attest that the style of holistic prayer described by Ann Shouting is very similar to the nîhiyaw kâkîsimowina in both belief and in the order and style of verbal delivery. The many ceremonialists that I have had the privilege of engaging with in formal ceremony generally share the belief that there is only one Creator figure for all people and that we simply have different names for this figure. Further, many of these ceremonialists believe that westerners have simply lost their way from the natural laws and their own pre-Christian traditions.

be here today.’ This sentiment continues to manifest in many nîhiyaw ceremonies. As practitioner Mary Cardinal-Collins describes, “We talk to our ancestors and our departed” (personal interview, May 28th, 2014). Our nistamîmakanak are often viewed as having a higher level of traditional wisdom, knowledge and spiritual attainment than current generations. Although they can never be pawâkanak ‘dream spirit guides’, they are still known as acahkwak ‘spirits or souls’ with an ability to interact with humans from distant places in nîhiyaw cosmological network. This view contrasts with the older prevalent western assumption of a modern superiority (often due to scientific and technological advancement) and a dark, primitive past.

In translating nîhiyaw sacred concepts, there are always some slight dialectical variations to consider. As the previous subsections on values and cosmology indicate, nîhiyaw tâpisiwin can be approached from a wide variety of interrelated angles. According to nîhiyaw cosmology, nîhiyawîwin comes from kihcimanitow and from the spirit world. It was the language spoken by kistîsinaw, ‘our elder brother’ wîsahkîcahk, and all of the deities that shaped the collective histories of all Cree Peoples. Perhaps this strong unconscious link to the past is what Rose Wabasca describes when she states:

Cree language comes from the heart and I recognize it as God-given. When I speak English it seems to only come from my mouth and my brain. I have more faith and belief in what I am saying when I’m speaking Cree. (R. Wabasca, personal interview, June 3rd, 2014)

Nîhiyaw philosophies are embedded in the language itself and that language gives nîhiyawîwin speakers a home, a place of belonging and a profound sense of identity.

This is what allows them to join in the stories, teachings, ceremonies and laughter of the mîkowahp.

Kâkîsimowin: The Spirit of Nîhiyaw Prayers

Much of our knowledge was obtained from ceremonies and connection to the spirit world as well as from dreams. It was with direct contact with guardian spirits, visions, dreams and insights during ceremonies. (M. Cardinal-Collins, personal interview, May 28th, 2014)

The formal nîhiyaw ways of ceremonial prayer involve the concepts kâkîsimowin and mawimôscikîwin, which differ significantly from western concepts of prayer. Mary Cardinal-Collins describes both nîhiyaw concepts as, “beseeching and asking for pity” (personal interview, May 28th, 2014). Reuben Quinn describes kâkîsimowin as “imploring in a sacred manner” while he describes mawimôscikîwin as “a more humble pleading” (R. Quinn, personal interview, May 26th, 2014). Dorothy Thunder defines kâkîsimowin as, “supplicating the spirits/god with humility” (personal interview, May 27th, 2014). The root of mawimôscikîwin is mawimoh, which means, ‘to cry out’, indicating a humble and heartfelt place evoking raw emotions. These concepts stem from a conviction that nothing in the world can be taken for granted; that nothing is certain or absolute except humility and that whatever we’ve been given by creation is merely on loan to us pitiful humans. In fact, the word kitimâkihtawinân, a pleading imploring the powers to ‘have pity on us all’, is a common thread that runs through kâkîsimowin and mawimôscikîwin like a mantra.

To *kâkîsomoh*⁴² is to acknowledge *kihcimanitow*, the *pawâkanak*, the *âtayohkanak*, guardians of the sacred directions and all relevant deities by name but then to move onto a freeform of expression elders and ceremonialists describe as ‘praying from the heart’. As a humble form of expression the pleading is focused on healing, recovery from illness, wisdom and understanding, not requests for material gain or power over others. Resorting back to literature for a moment, Evan Pritchard, in explaining an Algonquian perspective on prayer states, “petitioning God to give you more than the other guy is not ‘speaking as one with,’ but separating yourself from the Creator” (1997 p. 70). This is consistent with the *nîhiyaw* and Algonquian ceremonial teachings I was groomed on.

To a new language learner, these forms of religious verbal expressions might sound ecstatic and chant-like, similar to the sounds made by charismatic evangelical Christians when speaking in tongues. *Kâkîsimowin* and *mawimôscikîwin* make use of some high Cree words and other ceremonial terms that are not used in every day speech. Participants with basic fluency can often begin to pick up the meanings of these terms by being around the songs, teaching stories and language of the ceremonies. The ceremonies themselves are a valuable teaching tool and can introduce learners to the *âtayohkanak* and deities such as *kisînapîwasiniy* ‘kind man rock’, *kîsikâwipîsim* ‘day sun’, *piyisiwak* ‘thunder beings’, *nîwokâtîwayisîniw* ‘four-legged person’ (in reference to a bear spirit revealing the strong connection between bears and humans), *mamihkwîsîsak* ‘the hairy faces’ also known as ‘little people’, *kîskwihkâniskwîw* ‘the holy clown woman’ and many other cosmological

⁴² *Kâkîsomoh* is the verb command version of *kâkîsimowin*.

figures, each known for their specific knowledge, wisdom and gifts. Mary Cardinal-Collins knows of at least thirteen deities that are specifically grandmother figures and she describes these spirits of nîhiyaw cosmology as “archetypes similar to the idea of patron saints in Catholicism” (personal interview, May 28th, 2014).⁴³ The ceremonies remain a valuable opportunity to directly experience nîhiyaw cosmology in action.

Wayne Jackson states that kâkîsimowin and mawimôscikîwin have often been replaced by another nîhiyawîwin term ayimîhâwin, which many speakers mistakenly assume is a traditional nîhiyawîwin term for prayer:

In some Cree communities, the use of ceremony is shunned or not encouraged; rather ayimîhâwin (Christian prayer) is replacing kâkîsimowin as a means to make prayers and supplication to the Creator. (W. Jackson, online survey, May 2014)

Ayimîhâwin is the Christian influenced word for prayer. In the Woodland dialect, the root ayimih means ‘to speak’. It is also related to the word ayimihcikiy meaning ‘to read’. Practitioners including Mary Cardinal-Collins believe that early nîhiyawîwin-speaking missionaries varied this term as a way to introduce nîhiyawak to Christianity and encourage them to read the bible (personal interview, May 28th, 2014).

There are also other concepts that may be Christian influenced including nohtâwînan meaning ‘our father’ and mâmawihtâwînan meaning ‘our collective

⁴³ The nîhiyaw cosmological deities can also be compared to the old Greek cosmological system or ‘mythology’ in that there were different deities all with specific gifts and characteristics. It is now rare to find somebody who knows of all the deities and all of the pre-Christian intricacies of the cosmological hierarchy and levels to the nîhiyaw spirit world. Many nîhiyaw ceremonialists believe that there were four levels to the afterlife. An important implication here is that learning continues even after leaving the earthly plane.

father of us all' and okîsikowak, which describes spirits similar to angels. Perhaps kihcimanitow was always a fatherly figure and, since Reuben Quinn describes okîsikowak as "sacred spirits that communicate directly with the Creator" (personal correspondence, May 26th, 2014), maybe okîsikowak originated from an old nîhiyaw term that had a similar meaning. There are many fluent speakers who would argue that much of the old nîhiyaw cosmological knowledge has become watered down through the generations since Christianity was introduced. In any case some of the old knowledge was transformed and some of it remained intact. It would be impossible to fully determine all Christian influenced concepts without detailed, specifically focused research on the etymology of sacred terms.

From the âtayohkanak, the grandfather/grandmother deities, the manitowak, and the okîsikowak, the nîhiyaw spirit world consists of various levels and orders of deities. This can be confusing to the uninitiated. For some, perhaps part of the attraction to monotheism, or at least the partial absorption of Christian concepts into a nîhiyaw worldview, was the idea of simplicity and direct access to a supreme being without having to navigate through a variety of intermediaries. Since the pawâkanak often have specific demands and require a life of discipline, service, accountability and willingness to face great fears, perhaps these early converts and religious dualists simply opted for what they saw as an easier way.⁴⁴ Ceremonialists, while proud of being practicing nîhiyawak, will often bluntly speak about

⁴⁴ A life of discipline meaning the rigors of annual fasting, sun dancing, crying for a vision, preparation of the sweatlodge, care of the sacred pipe, living alcohol and substance free, and all the extra rules to live by. Being on duty for people in need with no security or guarantee for their own basic needs, the life of nîhiyaw healers and ceremonialists, while spiritually rewarding, is not as romantic as the New Age books and magazines portray.

wihkaskomîskanâs ‘the sweet-grass trail’ being a tough demanding way of life requiring the nîhiyaw virtues of sohkitîhîwin ‘vigorous heartedness’ and sîpinîwin ‘resilience and endurance’.

Miyopimâtisowin Teachings

In exploring nîhiyaw proverbs and idioms with research participants, a proverb that we all had in common is the saying, ikamâ î tipîmisoya ‘we do not own ourselves’. In my own childhood upbringing, this teaching was a constant reminder that in our daily lives unseen forces are at work and that everything has a purpose. In the nîhiyaw world we are never independent of kihcimanitow and other cosmological and spirit entities and we are all accountable and responsible for our actions and decisions. Closely related to this is another saying, ikamâ konta ohci ‘it is not for no purpose’. This is a reminder that everything happens for a reason and that because of life’s ability to balance everything out, all things will turn out the way they should. It is a reminder that our primary responsibility is to try and live in synch with the natural laws of balance. Nîhiyaw forms of prayer are holistic reflections of this philosophy of balance. The âtayohkîwina, the teaching stories and narratives, are lessons that support this effort to live in balance. These stories are typically aimed to encourage listeners to live a life based on respect, humility, helpfulness, courage, and honour, and in accordance to many of the values and principles described in this chapter. According to our oral traditions each day is a mindful day of personal communication with the spirit world, an internal (and sometimes external) ceremony from sunrise to sunset. This is different from the

concept of worship for it is based on a belief that actions speak louder than words.

In other words, one is not judged by what they say but how they live and walk through this life; how they epitomize the concept of miyopimâtisowin, 'the good life'.

Practicing miyopimâtisowin is an artful way of allowing one's life to become a prayerful ceremony.⁴⁵

Protection of Ceremonial Terms

The meanings of many sacred nîhiyawîwin terms are not common or public knowledge and many ceremonial practitioners are reluctant to share traditional knowledge that can be taken out of context or misunderstood by academia, western thinkers or 'outsiders' in general. Despite the fact that cultural appropriation, intellectual property theft and exploitation of nîhiyaw culture are viewed as threats, some language practitioners (including participants interviewed for this study), believe that it is important to document the original translations of key ceremonial terminology before this information becomes lost or further watered down through English domination and other modern influences.

Research participants unanimously expressed concerns that ceremonial terms in general were slowly falling out of use and that in the future, nîhiyaw ceremonies would be conducted in English.⁴⁶ It is significant that the area of sacred

⁴⁵ Nîhiyaw elders in my life, ones who live in accordance to these traditions, are inspiring examples of people who live in total acceptance of the world as it is and are at peace with it. Such elders are calm, rarely seeming very stressed or worried. To run the risk of sounding romantic, they are Tao/Zen-like masters at simply being themselves with no facades, pretentions or hidden agendas. They have earned their Elderhood.

⁴⁶ From a nîhiyaw perspective it is difficult to separate concepts like ceremony, spirituality, cosmology and the sacred.

nîhiyawîwin terminology has been identified so strongly by such a cross section of experienced practitioners, faith-keepers, and educators, all who are fluent speakers.

In addition to sacred terminology, terms related to the nîhiyaw kinship system were also of significant concern to participants. From my own experience I have also noticed that land-based terms related to landscapes, weather systems, flora and fauna are falling out of use. Words that may be falling out of use are going to vary from dialect to dialect and region to region. Terms specific to these broad domains cannot all be addressed in this thesis so I have focused on terms related to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. All of the ceremonial and cosmological terms I have thus far highlighted in this thesis are potentially falling out of use.

Words Less Spoken

Other ceremonial concepts specifically identified by practitioners as being “at-risk” include the terms and phrases listed below. I am providing the definitions as explained by participants as some terms are new to me. Notice the many implied meanings:

- **Aniskâc:** Used in ceremonies to indicate a relational connection, this term is translated loosely by Mary (M. Cardinal-Collins, May 28th, 2014) and Reuben (R. Quinn, May 26.2014) as, ‘ furthermore’ or ‘further on’.
- **Kâkiy-isinâkohtât:** Translated by Dorothy (D. Thunder, May 27th, 2014) as ‘the beauty of the land as the Creator had intended’. Note: the term does not refer to God but implies it.

- **Kâkiy-miyikawisiyâ:** Translated by Dorothy (D. Thunder, May 27th, 2014) as ‘that which was given freely to us by the Creator’. Note: none of the morphemes indicate God but it is clearly implied in a way that fluent speakers would understand.
- **Otawinikîwin:** Translated by Dorothy (D. Thunder, May 27th, 2014) as ‘God’s creation and order of things’. This would include the natural laws and protocols. This term does not refer to God but implies it.
- **Pakwânîmowin:** Indicating being lost spiritually. Reuben Quinn (R. Quinn, May 26th, 2014) describes it more literally as a meaning similar to ‘I don’t know where my spirit is taking me’.
- **Papîwin:** Described by Mary (M. Cardinal-Collins, May 28th, 2014) as a term for ‘good luck or fortune’. Used only in ceremonial contexts.
- **Tipahwân:** Described by Reuben (R. Quinn, May 26th, 2014) as a term meaning ‘value’ and indicating the personal value and worthiness of people.
- **Tisamân:** An old term meaning ‘to smudge’. It is a basic nîhiyaw purification ceremony (S. Ratt, online survey, May 2014).

In addition to these terms there is often a spiritual aspect to common terms that we take for granted in everyday discourse. Terms like nâpîw ‘man’, iskwîw ‘woman’ and nôtakowîsow ‘old woman’ likely all have spiritual meanings that can shed light on nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin. Reuben Quinn believes that iskwîw originates from a nîhiyawîwin word for prophecy that may indicate that women specialize in this ability and also stated the term nâpîw may actually mean ‘a fierce protector’ (R. Quinn, May 26th, 2014). It has been said that nôtakowîsow describes ‘a woman who

wears a shawl' but I've also heard it described as 'a woman in charge of gathering up the children'. It is obviously important to research the original meanings of these terms while some key elders are still available. From a language revitalization perspective, it is important to identify key words related to these teachings and focus on the full meanings. This information can then be used to provide more insights into nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin and cosmology while reclaiming and documenting related old nîhiyawîwin terms that may be falling out of use in each dialect or region.

Questions About Specific Sacred Terms

In examining the results of interviews and questionnaires with practitioners, there were some differences of opinion on translations of some ceremonial terms. One practitioner had no issue with the concept of mother earth being a nîhiyaw concept while others clearly believed it to be a pan-Indian influenced concept. As a result of varying information and minor contradictions on translations between practitioners, more questions were brought to mind. If a goal of practitioners is to research original nîhiyaw concepts in order to document and protect them, why not start by investigating some of these terms? I will expand on these terms (some of which have already been introduced) and focus on possible investigative angles.⁴⁷

The term *acahk*, sometimes spelled *ahcahk* and meaning 'spirit', could be researched to explore its possible cosmological connection with *acahkos* the word for 'star'. *Acahkos* looks like a diminutive version of *acahk*. If this is the case, the

⁴⁷ Please note that many of these concepts have already been introduced and I do not want to fatigue readers new to SRO. Refer to the glossary or previous sections for full translations and insights on these terms.

literal translation of 'star' becomes 'little spirit'. This is a significant change. Reuben Quinn (R. Quinn, personal communications, May 26th, 2014) believes there is a cosmological connection. Perhaps there is an âtayohkîwin teaching that could shed light on this possibility.

The term kihcikîsikok meaning 'great or sacred sky' is used to refer to 'heaven', yet based on the various practitioner descriptions, there are big differences between nîhiyaw and Christian concepts of the afterlife. The term kihcimanitow 'great spirit' has become interchangeable with kisîmanitow, which translates as 'kind spirit' in reference to a single god figure. Was the kisî prefix meaning 'kind' added as a descriptor because of Christianity? Since other Algonquian languages have their own versions of kihcimanitow, a comparative analysis would be an obvious starting point. Terms like okîsikowak, used for 'angels' and mâmawihtâwînân meaning 'our collective father' could be investigated to determine whether they stem from pre-contact nîhiyaw concepts or Christian influences.

The name of the folk hero and deity wîsahkîcahk is a word that is difficult to translate even with a breakdown of morphemes. The prefix wîsah could stem from wiyasi as in îwiyasipayit meaning 'something funny happening to someone'. It could also be related to wîsak as in wîsakistan indicating 'someone getting hurt'. Personally, as a nîhiyawîwin speaker and ceremonialist, I want to know the proper meaning of this important figure, as I'm sure many others would. Through language loss resulting from colonization, we may have been potentially robbed of this opportunity. It's our collective responsibility to at least recover the original

meanings of sacred and falling out of use terms in as much as this is still possible. It's our duty as practitioners to at least inquire so as not to potentially pass on misinformation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the results from the face-to-face interviews and online questionnaires with language practitioners and have supplemented this information with my own experiences as a fluent nîhiyawîwin practitioner. I have provided ideas and samples on how to more fully translate sacred terms related to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. Throughout this thesis I have provided examples of nîhiyawîwin terms for which there are no English equivalents and argued the case for fuller translations in order to gain deeper insights into nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. It is clear that there are some similarities in certain English-nîhiyaw concepts but that there are also vast differences, in fact, clashes in worldview. It's also clear that the meanings of nîhiyawîwin terms indicate certain characteristics and values. A comparative word-by-word analysis of Western and nîhiyaw worldviews is beyond the scope of this study. Still, these samplings and all of the terms explored in this chapter show the importance of language as a tool for gaining insights into worldview. Perhaps it is the most effective tool.

In the literature review chapter I touched on various ways nîhiyawîwin has been and continues to be affected by modernization including Christianity, pan-Indianism, the new age movement, mass media and the simple overwhelming power and domination of English usage throughout North America. Reuben Quinn, who has

been exposed to nîhiyaw oral history for much of his life, reminds us about the impacts of colonization:

The old Cree vocabulary used to be made up of approximately 600,000 words but during colonization there was an implosion, and at the same time the English vocabulary was exploding. (R. Quinn, personal interview, May 26, 2014)

I believe that it's important to remember that colonization is not just a thing of the past but continues in the form of colonial attitudes and policies that erode traditional indigenous rights. Nîhiyawîwin is our birthright and it has been assaulted and offered little recourse for recovery by the government that did the assaulting. It is up to us as nîhiyaw people to preserve, protect and revitalize our mother tongue. It is important to document the full meaning of key words, phrases and concepts so that we can also better maintain our traditions, ceremonies, stories and teachings. With many of our primary elders and knowledge keepers now gone and others in the latter stages of their earthly lives, this work becomes even more urgent. Language change is inevitable but without a willingness to hold onto and revitalize certain aspects of our nîhiyaw past, the watering down of our traditions will continue.

The revitalization of sacred terms and concepts would allow urbanites, youth and future generations of nîhiyawak to also have insights into the vast expanse of nîhiyaw knowledge and traditions. They should be invited into the mîkowahp to take a seat by the fire and get to know our elder brother wîsahkîcahk. They too should be enabled to comprehend the teaching stories shared in the mîkowahp and partake of the valuable lessons. Nîhiyawîwin and nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin are intertwined. A deeper examination of the full meanings of specific nîhiyawîwin

words and concepts has revealed this interconnection and provided insights into the profound nature of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin.

CHAPTER FIVE: Kîsihtâwina (Conclusion and Recommendations)

Examples and descriptions of nîhiyaw values, nîhiyaw protocols, nîhiyaw philosophy and the thought behind specific nîhiyawîwin terms and concepts have been provided in key chapters of this thesis starting with the opening story which is a first hand account of the lifestyle, practices, customs and pedagogy practiced in a rural nîhiyaw community. I have attempted to identify links between the worldview and cosmology through the lens of specific nîhiyawîwin terms and concepts. Language practitioners identified key nîhiyaw values and principles, discussed nîhiyawîwin linguistic structure, identified language issues, and provided samples of terms embedded within nîhiyaw teachings. Through these efforts, this thesis provides readers with a comprehensive overview of nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and some insights into specific terms and concepts. In doing so it has addressed the primary thesis question, *what are some key terms and concepts for exploring nîhiyaw tâpisiwin?* This was accomplished by providing broad translations of a wide variety of terms and concepts. The breakdown of key terms into morphemes and examination of their full meanings has revealed the interrelated nature of nîhiyawîwin and nîhiyaw tâpisiwin. Because of this it can be concluded that nîhiyaw tâpisiwin is completely intertwined with nîhiyaw cosmology, nîhiyaw customs, nîhiyaw ceremonies, nîhiyaw laws, nîhiyaw values and that nîhiyawîwin is a reflection of this interrelatedness. These findings are consistent with the views of scholars such as Keith Goulet and Willie Ermine who describe nîhiyaw tâpisiwin as reciprocal, relational, interdependent and interconnected. Nîhiyaw tâpisiwin is

based on a completely holistic paradigm and one cannot fragment or isolate it in order to understand its integrated nature.

In attempting to address the secondary question, *how can nîhiyawîwin words be translated to English and maintain their cultural integrity?* I have provided Walter Lightning's interpretation style (1992, p. 33-60) as an example of translating because it recognizes the nîhiyawîwin use of metaphors, implied meanings and is steadfast in ensuring accuracy. I also provided my own example in chapter four as another way to provide fuller translations. The question of how to maintain cultural integrity will always somewhat be based on target audiences, the objectives behind every resource document and the personal beliefs of contributing translators.

Because my goal was to model translations by explaining the multiple and implied meanings of certain words, there was simply not enough room in this thesis to expand more on each and every term. I offer this thesis as a starting point.

Considerations For Resource Developers

Many scholars have attempted to identify the common values and principles of North American indigenous people as a whole. One of the problems with this is that there are regional variations and differences to consider. If one puts out a popular online meme describing the seven grandmother teachings, the ten Indian commandments or some other number of sacred sounding principles, there may be some truth to them but they can also be overly simplified and it's doubtful that such memes can capture the full essence of sacred teachings.⁴⁸ Depending on the process

⁴⁸ There has been a lot of misinformation and new age-like pan-Indianism inspired by the books of writers like Hyemeyohsts Storm, Sunbear et al. The criticisms of such writings are abundant and can

involved, identifying numbers of sacred teachings can seem random and arbitrary especially if this is arrived at without the involvement of community-recognized knowledge-keepers. Hypothetically, even if a committee of elders identifies principles for their community or language group, within that community there could be ongoing debate about what to include or exclude because:

1. Values change through religious and political influence, formal education, mass media, inter-marriage, inter-tribal borrowing and various forms of modernization.
2. As is the case with nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin, there is overlap between concepts such as values, principles, protocols and laws, and conclusions cannot be arrived at without thorough engagement and deliberations.

Imagine the consultation process that would be required for identifying tenets that represent the beliefs of an entire culture. Community buy-in and the use of key knowledgeable elders and speakers of the mother tongue would be essential to such work. The use of language to research and properly translate old concepts and word etymologies becomes so important in these endeavours. Language learner and research participant Leslie Skinner reminds us that not all fluent nîhiyawîwin speakers are knowledgeable about the thinking and teachings attached to the language:

be easily found online. Some of this information includes 'medicine wheel teachings' which are now used as a tool in many Aboriginal healing and personal growth workshops. It is my understanding that only nîhiyawak of the plains (not from the woodlands) used these iskonowâcihcikana (nîhiyaw term for medicine wheels) and that some of these heritage sites still exist in nîhiyaw territory including at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatchewan. Original teachings about the iskonowâcihcikana are varied and do not generally match the 'medicine wheel' lessons of personal growth workshops.

Words are descriptive. So when we learn Cree we have to learn the Cree way of thinking about things. And it's not always the way we were taught even by fluent speakers, but it is the proper way. (Leslie Skinner, interview May 27, 2014)

It is also important to remember that not all fluent speakers make good language teachers or translators. In fact, not only do translators need to be immersed in nîhiyaw knowledge, they also need a firm grasp of English language terms and concepts. Intermediaries are sometimes needed to properly interpret an elder's knowledge and this is a specialized skill.

Another factor to consider is that many nîhiyawak have to varying degrees accepted or absorbed Christian beliefs and that many practice what Jean Guy Goulet (1982) describes as 'religious dualism', in that they see no contradictions practicing both Christianity and nîhiyaw ceremonial ways simultaneously. Indigenous decolonialists might see this religious duality as a form of subservience or co-optation but others might recognize this as an example of a highly adaptable nîhiyaw culture that is still operating from the tenets of reciprocity, inclusiveness and holistic thought. I have personally met and worked with a number of ceremonialists who equate Catholic saints with the ancestors, angels with the concept of grandfathers/grandmothers, Holy Communion with the pipe ceremony, and church with the sweatlodge.⁴⁹ Still, there are others who have relinquished their

⁴⁹ While I see some parallels between many religions and know many people who are religious dualists, including members of the Coast Salish Shaker church and other movements and practices, there are many nîhiyaw thinkers who question the fundamental theological and ideological contradictions between nîhiyaw practices and Christianity. There are also some believers that seem to legitimize their cultural beliefs through a Christian framework. Nîhiyawak of Alberta had a strong historic relationship with early Catholic missionaries and particularly with Albert Lacombe (from the mid 1800s on) who spoke fluent Cree and had the same status as a mamahtâwîniw, 'person bestowed with sacred spirit power'. There is a broad spectrum of beliefs between nîhiyaw ways and Christianity so these are not simple issues to address. Practitioners translating sacred terms, however, should encourage respectful dialogue rather than ignore such issues.

traditional spiritual beliefs altogether and replaced them completely with Christianity. As such, Christian ideology would insist that some of these individuals would see Christ as their sole saviour and that nîhiyaw ceremonial ways are a heathen form of worship; the work of the devil so to speak. While there are no public ideological battles to speak of in the nîhiyaw territories of Western Canada, the same cannot be said about eastern Cree communities where ideological conflicts between Christians and traditionalists have been fought more openly.⁵⁰ To make matters even more puzzling, some religious dualists and neo-fundamentalists are fluent nîhiyawîwin speakers with intimate knowledge about the land, history and stories. Because these fluent speakers have accepted Christianity to some degree or were indoctrinated at a young age, whatever the case may be, has their nîhiyaw tâpisiwin been affected or transformed? Do they play a role in the Christianization of pre-colonial nîhiyaw thought? This leads to even bigger questions such as, how much has nîhiyawîwin been impacted by external forces and how much can we recover? Which changes that we have consciously adopted or absorbed and why? My guess is that because of the impacts of residential schools and the fact that ideological differences have the potential to tear apart families and communities, these types of questions don't get asked very often. These are all factors to consider in any community collaborative process aimed at developing nîhiyawîwin language resources related to sacred knowledge.

⁵⁰ As in the cases of sweat lodges getting dismantled and traditional ceremonies getting banned in James Bay Cree communities like Ouje-Bougoumou, Quebec.

Nîhiyaw Principles Today

I personally believe that the principles and teachings of nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin are highly relevant and that they can help to make our present world a better place. Like the many elders who have been my teachers, I also believe that nîhiyaw values, laws and principles are essential to decolonizing, revitalizing and re-establishing our own institutions and reclaiming our rights to live freely in this world as Indigenous people.⁵¹ I would argue that many of the social and political challenges we face today as nîhiyawak are not just due to colonial practices and institutional racism but result partly from not following our own path; from not collectively living according to our own laws and principles. These days when traditional principles are formally adopted by our organizations, they are usually tokenized add-ons to western organizational and leadership frameworks. The old teachings are seen by many contemporary indigenous leaders as largely unsuited to modern realities. In my opinion, it's obvious that the old western models are based on a paradigm of power and control over resources. As such, these models continue to work towards usurping indigenous rights and powers as a means to access resources from our territories. The colonial agenda is not that hidden. In my opinion, these adopted western models need to be rebuilt from the ground up using indigenous principles as guiding forces if we are ever to see our collective way back to full practice of our language, traditions and cultural institutions. Decolonization may be a necessary component of such a process but I prefer to see it simply as a

⁵¹ Some of the many Elders who have shaped my nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin are listed in the acknowledgments.

practical re-assertion of nîhiyaw nationhood from the ground up. It starts with living our principles and our laws as a foundation. To fully appreciate these and other related concepts we must fully understand their meanings.

Recommendations

1. More work is needed in researching pre-colonial nîhiyaw beliefs, concepts and sacred terminology. Practitioners have already identified some of these concepts in chapter four as 'terms to be further researched' so the seeds have already been planted. From a language revitalization perspective, it is important to identify key words related to these teachings and focus on the full translations and deeper meanings. This information can then be used to provide more insights into nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and cosmology while reclaiming and documenting related terms that may be falling out of use in each dialect or region.
2. That in any research involving the etymology and origins of nîhiyaw terms and concepts, the elders and knowledge keepers utilized must be more than fluent speakers; they must be familiar with the old nîhiyaw terms and teachings around those terms. These elders and knowledge keepers must be identified, recognized and utilized for their knowledge and wisdom before it is too late. They are the front line in traditional nîhiyaw research and without them we are in danger of losing nîhiyaw knowledge.
3. If a goal is to research and preserve older nîhiyaw terms and the etymology of cosmological concepts, it is imperative that religious ideological questions

between Christianity and nîhiyaw sacred practices be deliberated up front. This minimizes the risk of discussions getting muddled in the middle of any collaborative process. Any research contributor with an adopted foreign religious practice, especially a colonial one such as Christianity, must be able to transcend their ideological biases. These differences have to be safely deliberated or put aside for the sake of our greater collective tâpwîwin, 'the truth in so far as it may be known'.

4. The need for inter-dialectical discussions cannot be over stated and will require the principle of mâmawihkamâtowin 'pitching in together in the spirit of togetherness'. While these inter-dialectical discussions happen informally among practitioners, it is time to formalize this dialogue. Recovering the original nîhiyaw spiritual realities to the best of our abilities in the face of overwhelming historic and contemporary Christian influence and modernization is crucial. The information about the countless ceremonies, deities and cosmological figures described throughout this thesis is ideal for discussion and verification with traditional elders and faith keepers familiar with the old ceremonies *and* familiar with Christian impacts on nîhiyawîwin.
5. That the exploration of worldviews, beliefs, cosmologies and the âtayohkîwina be expanded to the broader Algonquian language family where dialogue can center on comparative analysis and filling in the gaps in knowledge. The comparison of the Anishinaabemowin concept of Gichimanitou with the nîhiyawîwin concepts of kihcimanitow or

mâdawihîwînân; or the comparison of the âtayohkîwina deities wîsahkîcahk and Nanabozho and the figures of other Algonquian cosmologies would be an enlightening, fascinating and rewarding experience for practitioners, speakers and learners.⁵² There is truly much we can learn from one another and formal dialogue between all Algonquian language speakers is long overdue. It is my own belief that colonization interrupted the kind of inter-language dialogues that once took place with our ancestors and that it's up to the current generation of language practitioners to claim back this valuable inter-tribal process as one of the traditional forms of indigenous research.

Kihtwâm Sihcîkîwina (Next Steps)

This thesis can serve as a resource to nîhiyaw language practitioners, activists, adult educators, curriculum writers and language learners. It is my hope that it can be a paper for discussion within the nîhiyawîwin language community and can springboard into related projects such as the development of strategies to mitigate semantic change and preserve culturally accurate translations of key terms and concepts. Ideally such discussions and subsequent endeavours can feed into or merge with revitalization efforts in the Woodlands and Muskego dialects and other Cree dialects for we all have many shared beliefs related to worldview and cosmology. Ideally, the concept of mâdawihkamâtowin, *working in the spirit of togetherness*, can be the guiding principle in brainstorming and collaborations

⁵² There are many Anishinaabemowin dialects with variations on spellings of Gichimanitou and Nanabozho.

between all Cree dialects and other Algonquian languages. It is my hope that this thesis can provide the impetus needed for the eventual development of culturally appropriate nîhiyawîwin resources such as topical dictionaries, encyclopaedic dictionaries and thematic glossaries related to cosmology, ceremonial terminology, plants, nîhiyaw ecology and other domains of knowledge that are potentially at-risk. Based on the major differences between English and nîhiyawîwin, including the structural complexities pointed out in this thesis, many questions will arise in this work. For example, since nîhiyawîwin is so verb dominant and consists of so few adjectives, how should words be grouped? How should the lexicon be organized and classified? How can the morphology best reveal nîhiyaw concepts? I am confident that practitioners have already had these discussions informally but perhaps it's time to formalize a series of roundtables. The challenges of identifying organizations and individuals to conduct such work and to track down funding required can be overwhelming. This is especially true for language practitioners who are already teaching, developing curriculum or otherwise engaged in championing nîhiyawîwin.⁵³ In any case here are some key starting points:

1. Immediately identify the key elders and knowledge keepers that specifically suit the goals and tasks. Criteria for participation can be specifically designed for this purpose so that elders are not inappropriately utilized. They are the primary resources and the input of older elders who are still accessible and available is crucial. Since all nîhiyawîwin dialects are equally valuable and

⁵³ Despite Canada's recent formal apology to Aboriginal Peoples and the devastating impacts residential schools have had on indigenous languages, language funding from the government is grossly inadequate. The only options for Aboriginal organizations are to increase lobby efforts, seek alternative sources and engage in collaborative projects that maximize scarce dollars.

important to the process, all endeavors should be made to include contributors from a variety of dialects in as much as that is possible.

2. An organization needs to be identified to create a network of practitioners and to coordinate a series of talks aimed at the revitalization of key terms and concepts like the ones discussed in this thesis. Involvement should be based on baseline criteria during the crucial early stages of this process. Participants should at least be former and current fluent practitioners with an ability to write in syllabics and or SRO. The Cree Literacy Network or similar organizations are options to consider for embarking on this process.

In Closing

As pointed out in the opening story, the processes and results stemming from an undertaking to investigate ceremonial and cosmological concepts as a way to reclaim at-risk knowledge would allow current and future generations of language learners to gain valuable insights into a magical nîhiyaw world that some of us were able to catch a glimpse of. Such processes will benefit even those of us who are already able to converse in nîhiyawîwin. This is because of two factors that directly stem from nîhiyaw pedagogy and the teachings of our elders: that nîhiyaw learning never ends, and that nobody can attain an absolute level of nîhiyawîwin fluency. There are many who can lead the way but nîhiyaw tâpîsinowin reminds us that we are all learners.

Despite the many colonial impacts on the language, nîhiyawîwin has endured. Despite the Christian influences on nîhiyaw spiritual traditions, the

cosmological wisdom is still relatively intact. The values and principles are still followed by many. The ceremonies are still practiced and many are still conducted in nîhiyawîwin. We must, however, be steadfast in our revitalization and protection efforts as echoed by Arok Wolvengrey:

The language needs to be used daily in order for it to continue to be passed on to younger generations. No amount of school programs is going to save any language if it is not used in real life. The language needs to be used in order to properly transmit the culture. (Arok Wolvengrey, online questionnaire May 2014).

While some practitioners would caution nîhiyawîwin speakers on the dangers of taking our language for granted, I would also hope that we could celebrate the fact that it has thus far survived. There is still a foundation and wealth of knowledge to draw on. The language and the multiple layers of teachings that are attached to it are still the widest doorway to nîhiyaw tâpisiwin and nîhiyaw thought.

In our teachings I found the mîniyâw world flipped on its head-- all of the judgments and mistreatments that had hardened me and excluded me were reversed. In our language I found a home, and thus I've devoted the rest of my life to learning and sharing our way of life! (L. Skinner, personal communication, November 4th, 2014)

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Appendix A GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Due to the length of this thesis the following terms do not represent every nîhiyawîwin term used in this thesis. The translations are also not detailed because many of these terms have already been described in specific thesis chapters. The glossary is for easy referencing while reading this document. I have avoided the use of linguistic stem class codes. Readers are encouraged to further investigate the broader meanings of these terms.

acahk – the soul or spirit (sometimes spelled ahcahk)

acahkipeyihkanak – nîhiyaw syllabics (translates literally as spirit markers)

acahkomâmitonihcikan – spirit mind (refers to spiritual component of the mind)

acahkowin – spirituality or spirit ways

ahkamîmowin – a concentrated focusing of the mind

akâmaskihk –the land on the other side (describing lands across the way)

akâwân –smokehouse or drying racks used to smoke meat

askihkân – reserve land (literally a fake or substitute land. Also see tipâskân or iskonikan)

askihtakwâw – green (literally it is being the color of the earth; it is being of an earth-like appearance; it is being of a summer-like appearance)

askiy –1.earth; land; dirt;; soil; landmass; territory; country; can be used to describe the world as a whole 2. a year

ayapihkîs –spider (literally net maker)

ayimîhâwin – Christian prayer

âpihtawkosisân –half-son (used to refer to a Métis or a ‘half-breed’)

âtayohkanak – spirit deities of nîhiyaw cosmology (also see pawâkanak)

âtayohkîwina – the sacred stories and legends of cosmological deities usually told only in winter

Dane-zaa – also spelled Dunne Za, a branch of the Dene known historically as the Beaver (the Tsuu T’ina of Alberta are a closely related people)

iskonikan – leftover land; land rejected by the government

iyiniw – a person; a human being

iyinîsowin – a form of intelligence; wisdom; smartness; mental and spiritual alertness

îkimowan – it is raining

î kimowanihkîtwâw – they are rain-making (in the context of this thesis, referring to the fall rain brought by the bull moose to help loosen the velvet on their antlers)

î-nîmihtowak - they are dancing (referring to the spirits that manifest their celebrations through the northern lights)

kahkîwak – drymeat; jerky (the powdered form is used in pimihkân which is known more commonly as pemmican)

kakayiwâtisowin – a disposition of helpful servitude; industrious and action-oriented

kâkîsimowin – a mantra-like beseeching of the spirits

kihci – great, special, or sacred

kihcikîsikok – heaven or one level of the heavens (literally in the great sky)

kihçimanitow – great or sacred spirit; a benevolent life force—a spirit that sat above the pawâkanak and âtayohkanak (also known as kisîmanitow, the kind spirit and referred to in English as the creator)

kihçipimâtisowin – a great, special or sacred life or lifestyle

kihçiyimitowin – sacred respectful thoughts and actions for one another

kihtiyâyak - elders

kinanâskomitinâwâw – I am filled with gratitude to you all

kisâpahçikan – implement used to see through (refers to shaking lodge and ceremonies that obtain spiritual assistance to obtain information from the past, future or from a distance)

kisâpahçikîwin - spiritual assistance to obtain information from the past, future or from a distance

kisiyinow – used commonly to mean ‘old man’ but the prefix *kisî-* is the root for the word used for kindness. The word *kisiyinow* describes a person who has reached a place of worthiness in life in that they are recognized as kind, gentle and loving

kisî – incomplete word used to describe gentleness; kindness or compassion

kisînâpîwasiniy – kind man rock, an important cosmological deity

kisîwâtisowin – describes a state of ultimate compassion; a gentle, loving kindness and grace

kiskihtamowin – knowledge or a specific type of knowledge

kiskihtamowina – knowledges (it is normal to pluralize types of knowledges)

kiskinahamâtowin – the teaching of one another (a more inclusive and cooperative form of learning than standard Western pedagogy)

kistîsinaw – our elder brother (used to refer to the hero and deity wîsahkîcahk)

kitimâkihtawinân – have pity on us

kitimâkiyimitowin – pity; empathy; compassion

kohkom – grandmother

macimanitow – an evil spirit

mamahtâwisi – to have supernatural power

mamahtâwisit – someone is bestowed with spiritual power

mamahtâwîniw – a person bestowed with spiritual power

mamahtâw kîkway – something imbued with sacred spirit power

mamihkwîsîsak – little hairy faces; the little people deities (plural of mamihkwîsîs)

manâcîtowin – mitigation; protection; conservation; mercy (also spelled as manâcihtâwin)

manitow – a spirit being or a god; a sacred power; the basic mysterious quality in the universe

maskawisîwin – strength (the root mask may be related to maskwah the term for bear)

maskîkawînowak – people of the muskeg

maskwa-acahk – bear spirit

maskwah – bear (known in some regions as wâkayô[s] [crooked tail] and other descriptive terms)

matotisân – sweat lodge

mawimôscikîwin – a crying out; a humble beseechment to the higher powers and
spiritual order

mâcîwînow – one who hunts

mâmaskâtamowin – a state of wonder; amazement; surprise

mâmawihkamâtowin- bringing one another together; unifying; joining forces

mâmitonihcikan – mind and heart, thought and feeling

mistahay-yâpiw – a king bull moose; a grand bull moose

miyopimâtisowin – the good life; living well; being alive in a good way

miyo-wîcihtowin – togetherness; getting along in a good way

mîkawisowin – a gifting or giving or describing what was left behind

mîkowahp – a tipi or lodge

mosôm – grandfather

môniyâw – white person; Caucasian; westerner (stems from the French
pronunciation of Montreal)

môniyâw-mâmitonihcikanîwin – white society or western minded; greenhorn
mindedness

môsihtâwin – a sensing involving feelings or intuitive senses

nakacihtâwin – skill or being accustomed to a task

nakataskîwin – a leaving of the earth (used to describe death and the spirit leaving
the earthly plane)

nâkatohkîwin – paying absolute attention with all of the senses

nehinuw – Muskego Cree dialect version of nîhiyaw

nêhiyaw- a Plains Cree person or person of the Plains Cree language (may stem from the phrase nîwo-iyinowak meaning people of the four bodies.

Sometimes spelled nehiyaw)

nêhiyawîwin – Plains Cree language also known as the ‘Y’ dialect and sometimes spelled nehiyawîwin (no macron over the e vowel)

nimosôm – my grandfather

nistamîmakanak – the ancestors; the first peoples; the forerunners

nistohtamowin – deep understanding; comprehension

niwâpimâw – I see him/her

nîhithaw – a Woodland Cree person

nîhithawîwin – the Woodland Cree dialect

nîhiyaw – Northern Cree dialect spelling of nehiyaw (pl. nîhiyawak)

nîhiyawâtisowin – nîhiyaw beingness; Creeness

nîhiyawihîtwâwina – nîhiyaw sayings; teachings; idioms; proverbs

nîhiyawîwin – northern sub-dialect of the Plains Cree language

nîhiyaw kiskihtamowina – nîhiyaw knowledges or nîhiyaw domains of knowledge

nîhiyaw mâmitonihcikanîwin – nîhiyaw mindedness; being of a nîhiyaw mind

nîhiyaw sihcikîwina – nîhiyaw ways of doing things; nîhiyaw processes

nîhiyaw tâpisiinowin – nîhiyaw way of seeing; the nîhiyaw belief and value system

including deeply entrenched spiritual principles and order of life that

describes the nîhiyaw place in the universe

nohkom – my grandmother

okâwîmâw – mother

okâwîmâwaskiy – mother earth (likely an introduced term as discussed in chapter two)

oskâpîw – a young ceremonial apprentice

papiyahtikîmowin – a steady, quiet, slow, careful resolve

paskwâwînowak – people of the prairies (a term various branches of Cree use to differentiate the Plains Cree)

pawâkan – dream spirit helper (singular)

pawâkanak – spirit helpers; dream helpers; intermediary forces accessible to humans (plural of pawâkan)

pawâmowin – sacred spirit dreaming

pâstasowin – the scraping of the inner cambium layer of young aspens as a food source

pimâtisowin – life in general but can also mean culture or a specific way of living

piyak-askiy – one land or one earth (used to describe one year or one cycle of the land)

piyisowak – the thunderers; thunderbirds; thunder beings

piyisowak î kahkitowak – the thunderbirds are calling out to one another

sakâw – forest; woodlands

sakâwînowak – people of the forests (a term various branches of Cree use to differentiate forest or Woodland Cree)

sâkîtowin – love; love for one another

sihcikîwina – generally ways of doing things including means and processes

sihtoskâtowin – a pulling together in mutual support; a strengthening of one
another

sîpinîwin – resilience; endurance; hardiness

sohkitîhîwin – vigorous heartedness; courage

tapahtiyimisowin – thinking less of oneself; a form of humility

tâpisiinowin – way of seeing; a point of view

tâpwihtamowina – beliefs; what one believes to be true insofar as it may be known

tatawâw – it is open; there is space

tipâskân – land that has been measured or surveyed (in reference to reserve lands)

wahkôtowin – relatedness; interrelatedness

wâwahtîwa - northern lights

wihkaskomîskanâs – sweetgrass trail (sometimes referred to as
wihkaskomîskanaw meaning sweetgrass road)

wihtaskamihk – across the entire land (describing a vast expanse of land or the
entire continent)

wiyasowîwina – laws; natural laws

wîsahkîcahk – nîhiyaw cosmological hero and deity also referred to as kistîsinaw
(our elder brother)

Appendix B
Questionnaire for Cree Language Practitioners & Elders

A. Napoleon research project

Note: This questionnaire will be completed online for the language practitioners (group1) and in Cree, face-to-face for elders (group2)

1. Using Cree or English, what are five (5) words you would use to represent Cree worldview to a non- Cree speaker? Please translate these five words as fully as you can.
2. Using Cree or English, what are three (3) key concepts essential to gaining an understanding of Cree cosmology? Please explain these concepts.
3. What five (5) values (virtues) best describe traditional Cree character and how are these values exemplified?
4. Using Cree or English, what are some characteristics that describe the spirit and philosophy of the Cree language? Please explain these characteristics.
5. What are some key elements to understanding Cree language structure?
6. What are three (3) Cree proverbs or sayings you grew up hearing or have become familiar with?
7. What terms related to Cree worldview and cosmology are falling out of common use? Please translate.
8. What terms related to Cree spirituality and ceremonialism are falling out of use? Please translate.
9. Which sacred Cree terms (if any) have Christianity; pan-Indian movements or modernization influenced? Please explain.
10. Do you have other comments or concerns related to Cree language, terms or concepts as they relate to understanding traditional Cree culture?