

## Swampy Cree Accent of English

based on sample “Norway House 02”

Eric Armstrong

This accent is based on a speaker whose Mother Tongue is Swampy Cree. The speaker’s speech features many of the distinctive features of Cree phonology, though some are used

### ORAL POSTURE

The “oral posture” of an accent attempts to capture the way the articulators are used and held by the speaker in order to create the characteristic sound and “mouth feel” of an accent or language. In observing Cree speakers, it is quite common to observe that the jaw is quite close to the upper teeth, with little space within the mouth, and the lips are generally kept quite still with little to no “lip rounding” or lip-corner advancement for rounded back vowels, and consonants that are usually rounded in other accents, such as /r/ or /ʃ/. This means that the bulk of the effort is done by the tongue, which is somewhat retracted at the root. Overall, there is a tendency for a slight cupping of the tongue, which creates a somewhat muted quality to all vowel sounds. This tongue cupping/tension also enhances rhoticity or r-coloring in the accent, so that all rhotic centering diphthongs (NEAR, SQUARE, CURE, NORTH/FORCE, START), plus the vowels of the NURSE and LETTER sets, are strongly rhotic. They may be molar /r/, or more retroflex; it is hard to ascertain which, and perhaps it’s a bit of both.

### PROSODY

Generally, the pitch of the speaker’s voice is quite high. The intonation pattern is consistent with mainstream Canadian English, and their rate is consistent and even. There is a “bouncy” quality to the rhythm of the speech, and the use of unreleased final consonants can make them sound somewhat clipped. Occasionally the speaker uses glottal fry at the end of utterances, which is part of a de-energizing of the end of thought.

### CHARACTERISTIC CONSONANT FEATURES

There are a few features that transfer over from the Swampy Cree language. Perhaps most frequently occurring is the devoicing of final voiced consonants, especially /z/ → /s/, such as in plurals and verb tenses. Swampy Cree lacks some consonants, including many voiced consonants: /b, d, g, ʒ, dʒ, v, ð, ɹ, ŋ/, so this devoicing is consistent with that. Other “missing” consonants in Swampy Cree include /f, θ/. However, this speaker does utilize all of these consonants in their English, only occasionally making substitutions.

Voiceless stop-plosive /p, t, k/ are unaspirated [p̚, t̚, k̚] in Swampy Cree generally, though aspiration is occasionally used for emphasis.

Most notable is the laminal articulation of “sh” /ʃ/, which sits somewhere between /s/ and /ʃ/, made with more of the blade of the tongue. I’ve transcribed it with [ɕ], though one might use the voiceless alveolo-palatal fricative [ç] in its place. Overall, it sounds more high pitched than [ʃ]. This sound is also used in the “ch” /tʃ/ affricate, [tɕ]. With the absence of /ʒ/ in Swampy Cree, words like *measure* can also be articulated with [ɕ], though this speaker doesn’t exhibit

this in their reading of *Comma Gets a Cure*. Interestingly, /dʒ/ is part of this accent, though not part of the language.

Voiced “th” /ð/, which appears in many English function words, such as *they, them, their, those, the*, etc., is absent in Swampy Cree, so we get /ð/ → [d]; occasionally it appears in a dentalized form, [ɖ], or combined with /ð/ itself [dð].

Final “-ng” /ŋ/, as in gerunds, verbal nouns, or present participles with *-ing* endings, are often with [n], though not always. Generally the [n] usage anticipates a consonant articulated on the alveolar ridge, [t, d, n, l, ɹ, θ, ð]. (It should be noted that this feature and the previous one are also quite common in rural and working class mainstream accents in Manitoba.)

### CHARACTERISTIC VOWEL FEATURES

Swampy Cree has a very small inventory of vowels, with short vowels /i, u, a/ and long vowels /i:/, /e:/, /o:/, /a:/. The long vowels /e:/ and /o:/, as they correspond with the lexical sets FACE and GOAT, frequently are pronounced as pure vowels with no off-glide in this accent, especially when the vowel is short, and clipped off by a plosive consonant, e.g. *ate, able, so*; however, the diphthong is also part of this speaker’s inventory, as in *face, plain, yellow*, but with a stronger, more close off-glide [ej, ou]. Unlike more mainstream, contemporary accents of North American English which may be more open, the [o] is more close, similar to cardinal 7—though it is less rounded. (I’ve chosen to use [ɔ] for the transcription, rather than its unrounded counterpart [ʏ], which seems too extreme here.) As the short /u/ is written as “o” in the Latin representation of Swampy Cree, occasionally this short [u] is used in short versions of the GOAT lexical set, e.g. *so, goat*.

Similar to the lack of rounding in /o/, the GOOSE set /u/ is realized without rounding as well, and articulated further back than most mainstream speakers today. I’ve chosen to use [ɯ] for this vowel, with backing and less rounded diacritics. Its partner in crime, /ʊ/ as in FOOT, is also less rounded [ʊ], and further back than most mainstream Canadian speech today. Liquid U /ju/ occasionally but not always uses the traditional [jɯ] pronunciation, even after alveolars—we get it in a word like *new*, but not in *Duke*.

Rhotic vowels in NURSE and letter are [ɤ], and the centering diphthongs in NEAR, SQUARE, CURE, NORTH, FORCE and START all end in [ɤ]: [iɤ, eɤ, uɤ, ɔɤ, ʊɤ, aɤ]. In general, do to the oral posture, this rhotic vowel is more retracted, with the tongue slightly more curled; this oral posture trait also applies to the rhotic voice alveolar approximant [ɹ].

Finally, the accent features the trait known as *Canadian Raising*, whereby the price and mouth set, *when followed by a voiceless consonant*, are raised. In this way we get [aɪ] → [əɪ] and [aʊ] → [əʊ].

Consonant	Example	Swampy Cree	Notes
/ʃ/ sh	<u>She</u> , offic <u>ial</u>	ᑭ, ᑭ	Falls somewhere between /s/ & /ʃ/
/ʒ/ zh	meas <u>ure</u>	ʒ	Doesn't behave like /ʃ/
/tʃ/ ch	<u>much</u> , <u>it</u> chy, <u>cho</u> ice	ᑭ, ᑭ	Matches the /ʃ/ used above.
/dʒ/ j	<u>j</u> acket, hug <u>e</u>	ᑭ, ᑭ	If it devoices finally, it matches /tʃ/ above
/ɹ/ -l (final)	Well, animal	l, ɹ	Inconsistent, but generally lighter.
/ð/ th- (voiced)	The, that	d, ᑭ, ᑭ	Goes to the stop, esp. when fast.
/θ/ th- (voiceless)	Thought, ether, bath	θ	In spite of the variation with /ð/, this behaves normally.
/ɪŋ/ -ing (final)	work <u>in'</u> , strok <u>in'</u> , sing <u>ing</u>	n, ŋ	/n/ when followed by a dental or alveolar consonant /t, d, n, l, θ, ð, ɹ/
/p, t, k/	Perry, Tower, could	p <sup>h</sup> , t <sup>h</sup> , k <sup>h</sup>	some initial voiceless stops are unaspirated.

Phoneme	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/i/ ee	FLEECE	[i]	plea, meet, read, dream, each
1. Please leave the beach before you sneeze. 2. Ethan's teeth need cleaning each evening.			
/ɪ/ -y	HAPPY	[ɪ, ɪ]	pretty, lady, chassis, jazzy, foamy
1. Silly Jessie was pretty lazy and very funny. 2. The city is dirty, smelly and extremely sexy, baby.			

Features in grey boxes are similar to mainstream Canadian English

Phoneme	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/ɪ/ <i>ih</i>	KIT	[ɪ]	hid, miss, fill, rim, sing, rich
1. Which Hilton sister will sin with the richest celebrity? 2. Phil isn't really living in Ipswich in winter, is he?			
/ɛ/ <i>e</i>	DRESS	[ɛ]	met, bed, left, bless, edge, hem, neck, egg
1. Leicester sent ten red roses to Cecily. 2. Whenever Jeff gets dressed, he forgets his red necktie.			
/æ/ <i>a</i>	TRAP	[a, æ]	flap, jab, cram, bag, sack,
1. Naturally, the cat and the rat acted antagonistically. 2. The man made a gaff as he calculated the ant's mass.			
/ɑ/ <i>ah</i>	BATH	[a]	path, dance, brass, daft, laugh, branch
1. The calf stood halfway in the path. 2. The castle staff were members of the lower class.			
/ɑ/ <i>aa</i>	PALM	[a, ɑ]	garage, balm, aha, bra, taco, sergeant, bourgeois, mirage, piranha
1. Papa listened to the Bach sonata while he ate his taco under the palm tree. 2. The macho maharaja calmly enjoyed his massage.			
/ɒ/ <i>o</i>	LOT, CLOTH	[ɒ]	not, rod, rock, bog, profit, honest, loft off, Austria, cost, gone
1. The orange moth was extremely fond of cloth. 2. Stop waffling Tom and buy the odd clock.			

Phoneme	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/ɔ/ <i>aw</i>	THOUGHT	[ɔ]	taught, bought, applaud, hawk, small
1. Paul taught his daughter to crawl when she was small. 2. Never applaud a debauched and naughty performer.			
/u/ <i>oo</i>	GOOSE	[u]	scoop, boom, boost, move, tomb, groove
1. The youth with the loose tooth will choose to move to Vancouver. 2. The rude moose hunter wore his toque as he smooched with Sue.			
/ju/ <i>yoo</i>	Tune, Duke	[jɥ, ɥ]	cue, few, cube, huge, dupe, new, tune, stew, obtuse, deuce
1. The singer resumed the tune as the funeral director gave him is cue. 2. It's your duty to review the human rights bill as a neutral and lucid student.			
/ʊ/ <i>uu</i>	FOOT	[ʊ]	put, soot, good, wool, could
1. Should you put sooty candles in wooden pulpits when they could catch fire? 2. The pussycat on the cushion near the book watched the wolf eat the pudding.			
/ʌ/ <i>u</i>	STRUT	[e]	cup, rub, hum, pulse, butter, done
1. The young monk hummed as he hurried uphill. 2. Her mother fussed about adding a touch of butter to the cup of flour.			
Final /ə/ <i>uh</i> (unstressed)	Comma	[ə]	idea, sofa, saliva, arena
1. Deborah got an idea of the price of the sofa from Asia. 2. The saga names the aria played by the diva on the tuba in the arena.			

Phoneme	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/ə/ er (unstressed)	Letter	[ə̃]	sugar, actor, better, flavour, pressure
1. The soldier used his razor on his whiskers to cut a better figure. 2. An odor of camphor and rubber made a failure of the baker's sugar cookies.			
/ɜ/ ur	NURSE	[ə̃]	hurt, curd, burst, birch, girl, myrtle, assert
1. The courteous colonel preferred to fish with curds rather than worms. 2. I was urged to be a liquor connoisseur, said the earnest girl at her worst.			
Diphthong	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/eɪ/ ay	FACE	[eɪ̃, e]	change, taper, base, crêpe, wait, day, rein, they, reign
1. The baby's name is April, and she weighs eight pounds. 2. The raven-haired lady deigns to bathe in the wave pool.			
/aɪ/ igh	PRICE	[əɪ̃]*	night, like, rife, nice, type
	Pride	[aɪ̃]	hide, rise, fine, alive, futile
1. I'm fine with the time it takes for the night flight to get de-iced. 2. The wise vampire hunter attacked using a knife, a spike and an ice pick.			
/aʊ/ ow	MOUTH	[əʊ̃]*	out, pouch, south, house
	Around	[aʊ̃]	loud, gouge, thou, round, flour
1. The count used a towel to dry his mouth. 2. The loud noun featured a foul vowel that was hard to pronounce.			

\* Canadian Raising: When followed by a voiceless consonant, MOUTH and PRICE are raised to begin with /ə/ (schwa), and their offglides are /ɪ̃/ or /ʊ̃/.

Diphthong	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/ɔɪ/ <i>oy</i>	CHOICE	[oɪ̯]	toy, choice, moist, coin, groin, hoist, joist
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The boy found joy in employing his voice to make a loud noise.</li> <li>2. The oil from the buoy spoiled the oysters and made them poisonous.</li> </ol>			
/oʊ/ <i>oh</i>	GOAT	[o, oʊ, u*]	soap, coal, rope, joke, code, home, tone, toe
<p>The vowel /u/ is occasionally used in place of /o/—note that short “o” spelling in Swampy Cree is pronounced [u]. E.g. <i>so</i>, <i>goat</i>.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I loathe that the noble will ride the colt along the road.</li> <li>2. My brooch was sewn on the robe with the hole.</li> </ol>			
/ɪə/ <i>eer</i>	NEAR	[iɛ̯]	beer, career, here, cashier, weir, fear
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I fear her tears are sincere: she's weary of her career here.</li> <li>2. Don't interfere with the yearling, dear; it's acting queer.</li> </ol>			
/ɛə/ <i>air</i>	SQUARE	[ɛɔ̯]	care, fair, pear, their, scarce
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mary didn't care for what the fairy had to share.</li> <li>2. My heir swears with flair because our funds are so scarce.</li> </ol>			
/ɑɔ̯/ <i>ar</i>	START	[ɑɔ̯]	part, large, snarl, arch, marvelous, hearth
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please carve the turkey for the party with the sharp knife, Charles.</li> <li>2. The hearty sergeant was far from sharp.</li> </ol>			
/ɔɔ̯/ <i>or</i>	NORTH	[ɔɔ̯, oɔ̯]	resort, horse, chord, for, or, orchid, warn
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I warned Laura that it's important not to scorch the popcorn.</li> <li>2. The performance of the porn star cost a fortune.</li> </ol>			
/ɒə/ <i>oar</i>	FORCE	[ɒɔ̯, ɔɔ̯]	chore, story, torn, floor, coarse, course, oral
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nora swore about Dorothy's deplorable snoring.</li> <li>2. We ate porridge and pork in the forest beyond our door.</li> </ol>			

Diphthong	Lexical Set	Swampy Cree	Notes   Examples
/ʊə/ <i>oor</i>	Cure	[ɔə, ə]	boor, poor, tour, assure, lure, contour
1. The bourgeois fool assured us of the mural's authenticity. 2. The furious gourmet showed his maturity at the obscure feast.			
/aɪə/ <i>ire</i>	Tire	[aɪ.ə]	admire, buyer, fire, liar
1. The buyer will wire the squire about the sapphire she admires. 2. Will the liar ever tire of singing in the choir?			
/aʊə/ <i>hour</i>	Tower	[awə]	flower, hour, cower
1. The rain showered the flowers for two hours. 2. The powerless mouse will cower in the bower as we scour the house for him.			