

## Lesson 3.

### ***We learn how to exploit the tonal system to our benefit***

Without some kind of melody it is impossible not to get lost in the long Greenlandic words. So let us check out the tonal system. But before we can start we need to understand syllabification in Kalaallisut. That is a simple task as long as you remember that *-ng-* is one sound /ŋ/ and that double /ŋŋ/ is *-nng-* in orthography.

1. Syllables divide between two consonants. *tut---tu, a-te-qar---pu-nga, Ma-niit---su-mu-ka-ru-suk---ka-lu-a-qaa-nga, a-jun---ngil---lu-in---nar---poq*
2. Syllables divide before a single consonant. *tut-tu, a---te---qar-pu---nga, Ma---niit-su---mu---ka---ru---suk-ka---lu-a---qaa---nga, a---jun-ngil-lu-in-nar-poq*
3. Syllables divide between different vowels. *tut-tu, a-te-qar-pu-nga, Ma-niit-su-mu-ka-ru-suk-ka-lu---a-qaa-nga, a-jun-ngil-lu---in-nar-poq*

### **Pitch and stress**

Many students have a rather fraught relation to prosodic features as pitch and stress. Often the guilt lies with the school and boring classes trying to teach the tiny differences in terminal contours in various dialects. If you are one of such students you most likely have started to yawn already but do not do it! In Kalaallisut the acquisition of the tonal system is not just a minor improvement to lift your pronunciation from a B to an A. It is crucial if you want to be understood and if you want to avoid making a fool of yourself because sloppy pronunciation will create scores of unexpected words you never meant to say. The new feature you must learn how to cope with is the fact that words with long consonants mean something entirely different from look-alike words with short consonants. It is a popular joke to make learners pronounce *ussuk* which means 'bearded seal' because foreigners seldom know how to pronounce the long /s/ so that they wrongly produce *usuk* which means 'penis'!

And when the good student who understands where the problem lies tries to address the /s/ maybe even exaggerate its length his pronunciation will still sound like 'penis'. It is so because differences between long and short consonants are accompanied by differences in the tonal pattern and these patterns strike the ear stronger than physical length of the consonants. Or to put it differently: A proper intonation together with imprecise consonant length will sound a little corny but you will be understood. Wrong intonation will be incomprehensible even when consonant length in itself is about acceptable.

And there is a wonderful bonus to it once you have acquired a feeling for the melody: You will realize that your consonant lengths magically come out right. Trust me!

There is one thing I need to stress: What I teach you in this chapter is not the whole truth. Language melody is a combination of a huge amount of factors - much too huge for us to address in a primer as short as this one. What you get is an easy shortcut to the most immediately audible elements of the big

picture but with that safe inside your L2 toolbox you will find yourself in a comfortable position before the next steps towards mastery of Kalaallisut. So let us jump into it:

- a syllable with a short vowel and no closing consonant is uttered using your neutral voice. We call such syllables open.
- a syllable with a short vowel that ends in a consonant is uttered using a tone slightly higher than neutral. In word-final position, though, one often finds a neutral tone. We call such syllables closed syllables.
- a syllable with a long vowel is uttered using a tone considerably higher than neutral and higher than the pitch one finds in short closed syllables.

To illustrate the principles we will use a primitive notation. Pitch is relative so do not get led astray by the fact that we exploit the staff as we know it and use C flat as example. It is absolutely arbitrary but I trust that it illustrates my point.

Why not start right from the beginning? Here is the first sentence in *Genesis*: *Pileqqaarneranni Guutip qilak nunalu pinngortippai* ('In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.')



*Pi-leq-qaar-ne-ran-ni:*

*Pi* neutral tone since the syllable is short and open

*leq* is a closed, short syllable and should therefore be uttered a little higher than *Pi*

*qaar* is very high because it is long

*ne* is short and open. Back to neutral

*ran* is short but closed so it is a little higher than *ne*

*ni* is short and word-final so it should be neutral

*Guu-tip:*

*Guu* is long and accordingly high

*tip* is short and word-final so it is neutral

*qi-lak:*

*qi* is neutral because it is short and open

*lak* is short and word-final so that too is neutral

*nu-na-lu:* all syllables are short and open so all syllables will be uttered using a neutral tone

*pin-ngor-tip-pai:*

*pin* short and closed. A bit above neutral. NB note that there is no /n/ in the syllable. It is pronounced [piŋ]. *-nng-* is nothing but an orthographical shorthand for /ŋŋ/

*ngor* short and closed same tone as above

*tip* still the same tone

*pai* is long so it needs a high pitch. NB: word-final *-ai* is not pronounced with a diphthong as English *I*. It is orthography for a long /a/ that closes in a little j-sound [aaʲ]

## How to go on from here

You now have all the tools you need to read and pronounce Kalaallisut decently. But you most likely need a little time for the many pieces of information to settle and you need a little practice, I guess.

Here you get Genesis 1.5 with all possible information included. The text is divided into syllables, you get it both as text and in a phonetic transcription and you get the broad prosodic analysis using our simple music notation. Walk through it and make sure you understand everything. If you are a brain-learner rather than an ear-learner and would want further details about this topic you might want to consult the chapter on sound system from the grammar book. You find the relevant chapter included as text on the DVD.

*Qaa.ma.sor.lu Guu.tip ul.lor.mik taa.vaa, taar.tor.lu un.nu.a.mik.*



*Taa.va un.nun.ngor.poq ul.laan.ngor.lu.ni.lu, ul.loq si.ul.leq.*

