

SHINGLE SPRINGS BAND OF MIWOK INDIANS

LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

FREQUENTLY ASKED LANGUAGE QUESTIONS

2025



<https://bit.ly/ssbmi-language>

WHAT ARE THE NATIVE LANGUAGES OF THIS REGION?

The Nisenan language has been spoken throughout the Tribe's ancestral homelands since time immemorial. The map below shows the approximate range of the Nisenan language and its four major dialects as well as the neighboring Native languages of the region.

WHAT ARE LANGUAGES & DIALECTS?

A **dialect** is a particular way of speaking a language and is usually associated with a geographical region. Dialects of the same language are **mutually intelligible**, meaning that people who speak different dialects of the same language can generally understand each other.

The Nisenan language has four major dialects: Valley, Southern Hill, Central Hill, and Northern Hill Nisenan. Valley Nisenan and Southern Hill Nisenan are the Tribe's heritage dialects and are fairly similar to one another.

Languages, on the other hand, differ so much that people who speak different languages generally cannot understand each other. Languages are **mutually unintelligible**.

'Miwok' refers to a whole family of languages. For example, Plains Miwok and Northern Sierra Miwok are mutually unintelligible languages, each with its own dialects.

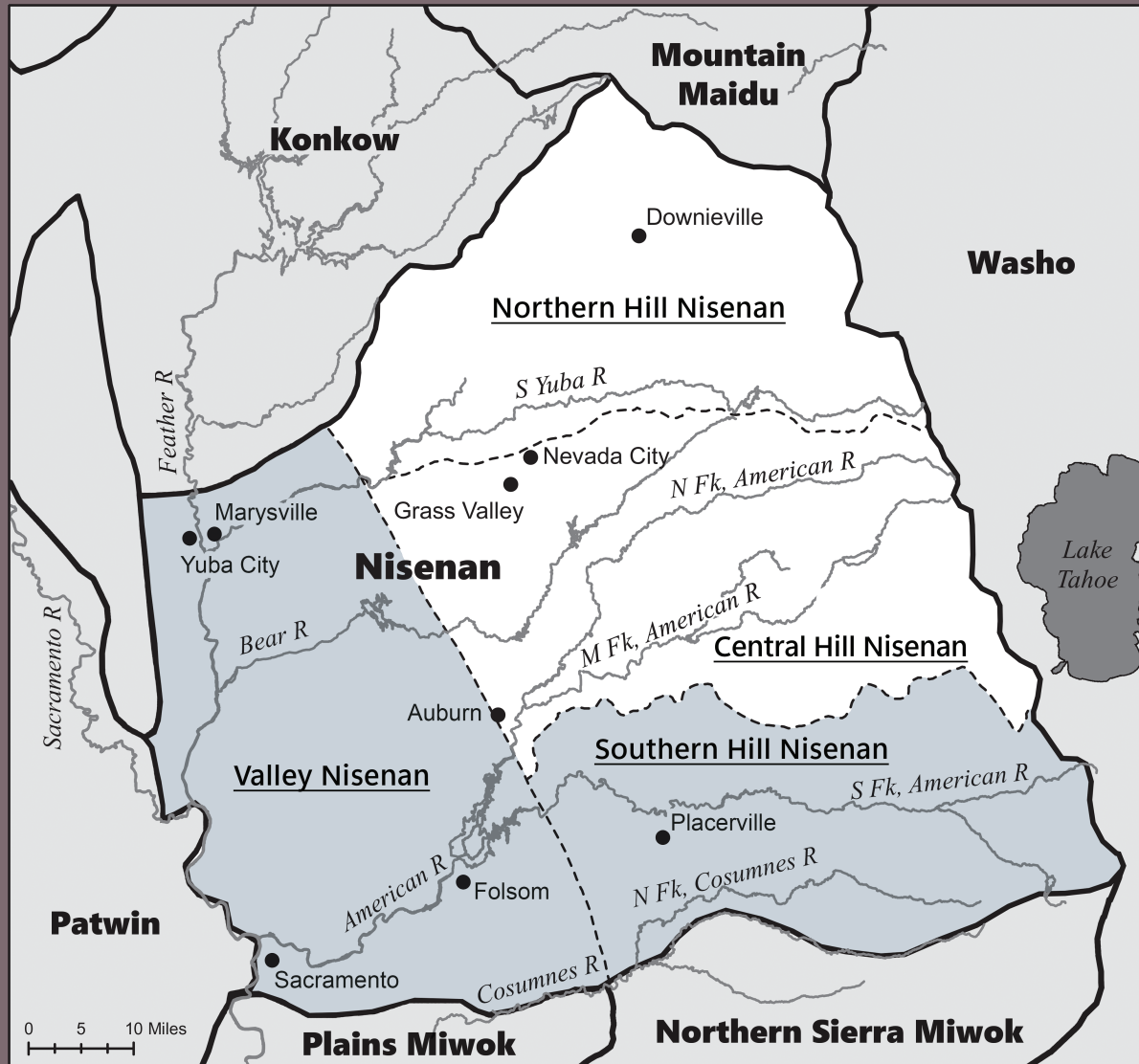
California is one of the most linguistically diverse places on earth with ~78 mutually unintelligible Native languages (Golla 2011).

WHAT IS THE SSBMI COMMUNITY'S LANGUAGE BACKGROUND?

Pamela Cleanso Adams, matriarch of the Tribe's valley lineage, spoke Valley Nisenan. She and her relations passed on most of the knowledge we have about this dialect today. Based on where she was from and the language of her relations, **Annie Hill Murray Paris**, matriarch of the Tribe's foothill lineage, likely spoke Southern Hill Nisenan.

The earliest written records of the Nisenan language are from the 1840s and come from Pusúune, Sáama, and Seek, three of the Tribe's ancestral villages which are now encompassed by Sacramento.

Traditionally, multilingualism was common. Depending on where and when they lived, the Tribe's Ancestors may also have spoken Patwin, Plains Miwok, Northern Sierra Miwok, Konkow, Hawaiian, Spanish, and/or English in addition to Nisenan.



Map 1: The Native languages of the region, adapted from Golla (2011:137), "California Indian Languages."

WHAT DOES THE SSBMI LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT DO?



The Language Department's mission is to revitalize the Nisenan and Northern Sierra Miwok languages by educating and promoting a strong language speaking community.

Language revitalization is a long journey. Currently, our main focus is on research. We are working to understand the languages, mostly through archival and historical documents, so that we can develop comprehensive language learning resources.

While this work is underway, we are providing basic language learning resources that focus on vocabulary and short, functional sentences through our website and social media.

We also work to educate the SSBMI Community, Tribal partners, and the public about the Tribe's heritage languages through outreach and community events.

ARE THERE APPS OR TEXTBOOKS I CAN USE TO BECOME FLUENT IN NISENAN OR N. S. MIWOK?

To the best of our knowledge, there are not currently comprehensive resources available that cover beginning to advanced Nisenan or Northern Sierra Miwok. Producing such resources is one of our long-term goals.

Other communities are also working to revitalize the Nisenan and Northern Sierra Miwok languages and additional resources may be available. If you would like help finding more information, please contact us!

WHAT LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES DOES THE LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT CURRENTLY OFFER?

We have several resources for learning words and simple phrases, such as:

- ▶ Word of the Day on Social Media
- ▶ Flashcards
- ▶ Games
- ▶ Coloring pages and activity sheets

You can find downloadable versions of our materials on our website along with audio recordings to support your learning. You can email us to request printed copies of our flashcards and other resources (supplies are limited).

We also host language activities and outings for the SSBMI community, employees, and Tribal partners.

HOW CAN I STAY INFORMED ABOUT EVENTS & RESOURCES?

Sign up to receive notifications about our events and new resources! Email us to introduce yourself and provide your contact information.

CONTACT US

Email: Language@ssband.org

Website: <https://bit.ly/ssbmi-language>



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