



## Salish Root Project

# Mother's Day Through the U-Vowel

A deep-dive entry on **tuḿ**, **sk<sup>w</sup>uy**, relational motherhood, and carried/inherent orientation



### Extension Document 008

*The language remembers the relationship  
even after the child outgrows the mother.*

#### Entry focus

This document uses Mother's Day as a doorway into a deeper structural discussion of the **u-vowel** and two related root families: **tuḿ** and **k<sup>w</sup>y**. It is written for learners who may have been taught to hear vowels mostly as pronunciation, and are now beginning to see that vowels can carry meaning, orientation, and grammatical structure.

**Public website entry / research companion**

*Prepared for the Salish Root Project, May 10, 2026*

## 1. Why Mother's Day Opens This Discussion

Mother's Day is often framed in English as a celebration of a role: **mother**. The English word is broad, useful, and emotionally powerful, but it does not show very much structure on the surface. It does not immediately tell us whether we are speaking from the perspective of a daughter, a son, a first-born child, a foster relation, a household relation, or a wider ceremonial relationship.

In Salish, the words themselves often ask us to slow down. They do not merely label a person. They place the person inside a field of relationship. In this entry, two mother terms give us a strong example: **tuṃ** and **skʷuy**.

Form	Core gloss	Structural note
<b>tuṃ</b>	mother of a female; prominent of itself	A daughter makes a woman a tuṃ. The root carries prominence, standing-out, and self-held importance.
<b>skʷuy</b>	mother of a male; mother in relation to a son	Built from kʷuy, inherently diminutive or of small nature. The relationship is oriented through the son as the smaller/younger relational point.
<b>sxʷlxʷlɥeṃs</b>	mother and daughter	Literally "the living together," showing mother-daughter relation as a lived reciprocal relation.

The goal here is not to flatten these words into simple English equivalences. The goal is to ask what the language is doing. Why does one mother word arise through **tuṃ**, "prominent of itself," while the other is related to **kʷuy**, "inherently diminutive, of small nature"? What does this show us about vowels, roots, children, and relationship?

### A learner's turning point

One thing I would not have known to ask earlier as a learner is: **Why this vowel?** If vowels are treated only as pronunciation, then forms like **tuṃ** and **skʷuy** look like separate vocabulary items. When vowels are understood as part of the structure, they become evidence.

## 2. The U-Vowel: Carried Condition Available for Realization

The **u-vowel** is not simply "ability" or "potential" in an abstract English sense. In this project's current working description, **u** profiles a **carried condition available for realization**. A condition, quality, or structure is carried in a usable form: within the subject, forward through time, or outward into action and expression.

Because of this, English may translate **u**-forms as inherent, able, natural, fitting, characteristic, or by-nature. But those are English outcomes. The Salish structural idea is that something is already being carried as part of what the root can give, do, become, or display.

Vowel	Working orientation	Mother's Day relevance
a	significant stative condition	A condition set apart, held with significance, or culturally marked.
e	dynamic embodiment; active state	A role, function, or question embodied in the present relation.
i	process/result orientation	A movement into result, development, or coming-to-be.
u	carried condition available for realization	A quality or role carried as part of what something is, can become, or naturally displays.

This matters for the Mother's Day entry because both **tuṃ** and **skʷuy** contain the u-vowel in key ways. In **tuṃ**, prominence is carried as a self-held role. In **kʷuy**, diminutive relation is carried as a nature or role. The vowel helps show that the form is not merely describing an action happening from the outside. It profiles a condition carried as part of the being or relation.

### Connection to ṣsup

**ǰsup** can be heard as “it naturally became good/fitting.” The u-vowel helps show that the fittingness is not imposed from outside. It is carried forward as something the form can realize from within itself. This same doorway helps us look again at **tuń** and **k<sup>w</sup>uy**: not as random vocabulary, but as carried relational orientations.

### 3. The tuń Root Family: Prominence, Use, and Self-Held Standing

**tuń** can be described as prominent, useful, or marked by noticeable utility. It points to something that stands out from its surroundings because it matters in the field. It is not only present; it has relevance, prominence, or recognizable function.

This root family becomes especially useful for showing how vowels change the orientation of the same shell. The forms **tań**, **teń**, **tiń**, and **tuń** should not be treated as disconnected words. They are different ways that prominence can be carried, embodied, made significant, processed, or held as a self-defining condition.

Root form	Abbreviated description	Bridge explanation
<b>tuń</b>	prominent, useful	The shell profiles useful prominence: something stands out because it matters, functions, or becomes noticeable in context.
<b>tań</b>	significantly prominent	With <b>a</b> , the prominence is held as a significant stative condition, often culturally marked or generationally important.
<b>teń</b>	embodies prominence; what use?	With <b>e</b> , prominence is embodied as function, purpose, or identity. This gives forms such as <b>steń</b> , “what? what is it for?”
<b>tiń</b>	process/result prominence	With <b>i</b> , prominence would be understood through development, result, or the process of becoming marked or useful. This slot is structurally expected even when fewer examples are present here.
<b>tuń</b>	prominent of itself	With <b>u</b> , prominence is carried as a self-held role or nature. The prominence belongs to what the being, object, or relation is.

This is why **tuń** is such a powerful Mother’s Day form. It is not only “mother” as a title. It shows the mother as a prominent relation carried by the birth and relation of a daughter. The daughter makes the mother visible in that role. The mother becomes prominent of herself within the relational field.

### 4. tuń: Mother of a Female and Prominence Carried by Relationship

**tuń** means mother of a female and also “prominent of itself.” These two meanings belong together structurally. A daughter makes a woman a **tuń**, not only by social label, but by establishing a relationship where the mother becomes prominent in that daughter’s field.

Form	Translation / gloss	Structural interpretation
<b>tuń</b>	mother of female; prominent of itself	The mother relation is carried as a self-held prominence.
<b>ʒs tuń</b>	She is a mother; she has a mother	The stative/imperfect frame locates the relation as held or ongoing.
<b>ʒs k<sup>w</sup>l̥tuń</b>	She acts as her/the girl’s mother	<b>k<sup>w</sup>l̥</b> - frames making/doing; <b>ʒ-</b> structures the initial relational role; <b>tuń</b> is the mother prominence.
<b>tuńys</b>	She, first daughter born, made her a mother	The daughter’s birth brings the mother-role into realized prominence.
<b>tuńmp</b>	your mother, talking to two or more sisters	The relation is indexed through a plural daughter/sister field.
<b>sck<sup>w</sup>l̥tuń</b>	foster mother of female; godmother	A made/established mother role for a female child.

The phrase **šey ɬu intuń ymšɬ kʷɬs swnumty** - “That’s my mother, you should be listening” - gives this relation social weight. The mother is not just identified. Her role carries authority, recognition, and a relational expectation.

A story example also shows how **tuń** can be used when speaking of children of both genders: **u t skʷuys tuńs cuntm...** “And their mother told them...” In ordinary narrative usage, the mother relation can anchor a family scene even when the children are mixed in gender. The structural distinction remains available, but speech also uses the mother relation in practical narrative ways.

## 5. tuńš and -ɬtuńš: Prominence Among People and Benefactive Social Direction

**tuńš** is built from **tuń** plus **-š**, directive or benefactive action. A useful working gloss is “prominent of itself for some benefit.” This form appears across many lexicalized constructions with a preceding lexical prefix plus **ɬ-**.

These forms are often translated with “among the people,” but that can become too broad. The stronger structural reading is that a prefix classifies the kind of act or condition, while **ɬtuńš** marks the action or agent as socially prominent, directed, and beneficial or consequential within the people field.

Form	Gloss	Interpretive note
<b>nɬmɬtuńš</b>	smiles for the people; smiles prominently	A prominent social smile; the name form carries positive public presence.
<b>mšɬstmɬtuńš</b>	annoy the people; be annoying among the people	A prominent irritating act in the social field.
<b>šʷcɬtuńš</b>	argue with people; argue at large	Argument becomes the prominent social action.
<b>ɬɬɬtuńš</b>	beg/ask for food among the people	The request for food is socially directed and prominent.
<b>ɬɬɬtuńš</b>	call on people for something	A public/social call for help, goods, or knowledge.
<b>nɬwqnmɬtuńš</b>	call someone out from the group	The calling-out action makes someone socially prominent.
<b>qɬtmɬtuńš</b>	fond of people	Cherished/fixed relation toward people.
<b>ɬcmɬtuńš</b>	commanding the people	Binding/compelling action becomes prominent in relation to people.
<b>nyɬkʷɬtuńš</b>	ferry people across	The action carries people through a crossing.
<b>mɬyɬɬtuńš</b>	show/tell/explain to the people	Making-known becomes prominent and socially beneficial.

### About ɬ- in these forms

The structuring prefix **ɬ-** positions derived prefixes at the initial stage of the word’s act or condition. It works well with formative, beginning, and kind/type constructions. It does not combine structurally with **s-** in the same way, because **s-** marks a holistic or nominalized structure while **ɬ-** is formative and initial-stage oriented.

### Truncated Forms: Seeing ɬtuńš Inside Common Words

A useful example is **swɬtu**, commonly spelled **suɬtu**, meaning “ask.” This common form helps show how many **ɬtuńš** words are shortened or truncated on the **u**, which can mask the fuller structure of the word.

The fuller structure is:

**sw- + ɬ- + tuń + -š**

**swɬtuńš** → **swɬtu** / **suɬtu**

Here, **sw-** carries the asking or questioning action. The **ɬ-** places that action at the initial or formative stage of social engagement — the question is put out into the field. The root **tuń** contributes prominence, and **-š** marks

relationally directed engagement that affects others. Together, the full structure expresses a question or request being put out into the social field, not necessarily aimed at one specific person in a tightly directed way.

This is why **swłtu / sułtu** is such a natural everyday word for “ask.” It is not only “ask” in the English sense. Structurally, it is an act of putting something out where others can respond. The question becomes socially available.

This pattern also helps learners recognize other forms built on **łtuńš**. In many cases, the full form may appear as **...łtuńš**, while the common spoken or written form truncates around **...łtu**. The **u** can preserve a trace of the underlying **tuń**, even when the fuller **ńš** portion is no longer visible in the surface form.

So when learners see forms ending in **...łtu**, they should consider whether the fuller structure may be:

**...łtuńš**

“a socially directed, consequential act put into the field from the outset.”

This makes **swłtu / sułtu** an important teaching example because the common form is familiar, but the full structure reveals the deeper relational pattern: asking is not simply producing a question; it is sending a directed social act into the field where relationship, response, and consequence can happen.

## 6. Other **tuń** Examples: Prominent Being, Thumb, and Cloud

The root **tuń** extends beyond mother terms. It can name prominent beings, prominent body parts, and visible environmental states. These examples help show that “prominent of itself” is not an invented explanation only for Mother’s Day. It is a pattern across the root family.

Form	Gloss	Structural interpretation
<b>tuńmx<sup>w</sup></b>	alpha wolf; prominent being; hero	A being whose outward form or life-force is socially or physically prominent.
<b>strńtuń</b>	currants; berries	Distributed or extended prominence; many small prominent forms.
<b>stuńčst</b>	thumb	The prominent finger, the one that stands out in hand function.
<b>sčtrńip</b>	cloud	A prominent condition that comes into inception in the sky.
<b>čtrńpasq̄t</b>	the whole sky got cloudy	Prominence spreads across the sky/day field.
<b>sčtrńip</b>	small cloud	Diminutive prominence in the sky.

Cloud words are especially useful because they show how prominence can be visual and environmental. A cloud is not merely an object. It is a noticeable form in the sky, something that emerges into visibility. In the same way, the mother relation emerges into social visibility through relation to the child.

## 7. **teń** and **steń**: What Use? What Is It For?

**teń** is “what use?” or “embodies prominence.” With the e-vowel, the root is not simply held as an inherent condition. It is embodied as function, purpose, or identity. This makes **steń** one of the most important inquiry forms: “What? What is it? What is it for?”

Form	Translation / use	Structural note
<b>steń</b>	what? what is it for? a thing	s- nominalizes the embodied prominence/function into a thing or inquiry.
<b>strńteń</b>	things, stuff; what is each thing?	Distributed inquiry over multiple useful/prominent things.
<b>ta steń</b>	nothing	Negative particle plus thing/use: no thing, no use, nothing.
<b>tř steń</b>	something	Indefinite/eventive particle plus thing/use: some thing.
<b>pysteń</b>	when?	A held phase/time period asked through what-use/what-place in time.
<b>k<sup>w</sup>łsterńmys</b>	What did s/he do/make with it?	Inquiry into the made/done use of an object.

This section matters for the Mother’s Day discussion because it shows the contrast between **e** and **u**. **teṛm** asks about embodied function or use. **tuṛm** carries prominence as an inherent or self-held role. The mother form is not asking “what is this for?” It is identifying a role carried by relationship.

## 8. taṛm and tiṛm: Significance and Process Slots in the Pattern

**taṛm** marks significantly prominent. With **a**, prominence is held as a significant stative condition. In **sčtaṛmḡn**, “4xgreat-grandchild; 4xgreat-grandparent,” the prominence is extended through lineage, relation, and generational height or depth.

**tiṛm** is included here as a structural slot in the **tṛm** vowel pattern. The expected reading is process/result prominence: prominence understood through coming-to-be, result, or a developed outcome. Even where fewer examples are available in this particular entry, the slot helps learners see how the vowel system gives a way to predict and test meaning, rather than memorize each form as unrelated.

### Pattern-discovery note

The point is not to force every vowel slot to have the same number of examples. The point is to notice that the shell **tṛm** remains stable while the vowels orient the prominence differently: significant state, embodied function, process/result, and carried/inherent relation.

## 9. The kʷy Root Family: Incipient, Small, Foundational

**kʷy** indicates something incipient, small, foundational, or at the first stage of development. It is broader than physical smallness. It can name immaturity, reduced force, low power, slow action, firstness, foundational position, or the small beginning that makes later development possible.

**This root family is crucial for understanding skʷuy**, “mother of a male.” The form is built with the nominal prefix **s-**, which names a whole structure or state. In this word, **kʷuy** does not primarily describe the son as small. It names the mother through her foundational relation to the son: she is the one who carried, began, and brought forth the male child. From the son’s perspective, he calls her the foundational one — the one at the beginning of his life. The **u** carries this as an inherent relational condition, and the nominal **s-** frames the whole relation as a named state. Later, when the son grows beyond her in size or strength, **kʷuy** can also carry a tender remembrance of that beginning: she was once the larger holder of his life, and remains the foundational one even after he outgrows her.

Root form	Abbreviated description	Bridge explanation
<b>kʷy</b>	incipient, small, foundational	The beginning or small-stage condition itself. It can be physical, developmental, relational, or functional.
<b>kʷey</b>	incipient settling	With <b>e</b> , the first-stage condition is embodied as something barely but actually settled, as in frost.
<b>kʷiy</b>	come to be diminutive	With <b>i</b> , the diminutive condition is reached through process or action: slow, quiet, reduced.
<b>kʷuy</b>	inherently diminutive; of small nature	With <b>u</b> , smallness or younger/lower relation is carried as a nature, role, or given relational condition.

## 10. kʷey: Frost as Incipient Settling

**kʷey** expresses incipient settling: the first realized stage of a condition as it begins to settle into place. The example **skʷeyt**, frost, is a strong illustration. Frost is not deep ice or accumulated winter force. It is the first thin settling of cold on a surface.

Form	Gloss	Structural note
sk <sup>w</sup> eyt	frost	A nominalized stative form of incipient settling.
y k <sup>w</sup> ey / i k <sup>w</sup> ey	It is frosted	The condition has settled as a perceptible surface state.
ʃs k <sup>w</sup> eyty	It is frosting	The settling is ongoing or imperfective.
sk <sup>w</sup> eylɪx <sup>w</sup>	frost on the ground	The settling is located in the land/form field.

## 11. k<sup>w</sup>iy: Process into Smallness, Slowness, or Quietness

k<sup>w</sup>iy describes coming to be diminutive. The i-vowel gives the sense of process/result. In examples of whispering, speaking slowly, going slow, or turning the volume down, the root is not only “small.” It is smallness as a resultive or process-oriented act: reduced force, reduced volume, reduced pace, reduced extent.

Form	Gloss	Structural note
nɪk <sup>w</sup> k <sup>w</sup> iyɪcn	whisper; talk little; talk quiet; talk slowly	Inside + initial small structure + outward expression at the mouth/sound edge.
ʃs nɪk <sup>w</sup> k <sup>w</sup> iyɪcny	S/he is whispering	The quiet speech process is ongoing.
nɪk <sup>w</sup> k <sup>w</sup> iyɪcnmt	Make it talk quiet; turn the volume down	A command to reduce the speech/sound force.
ɬk <sup>w</sup> k <sup>w</sup> iyɪt	S/he goes slow	The act is held in a reduced pace.
ɬk <sup>w</sup> k <sup>w</sup> iyɪtʂ	Go slow	Commanded slow/reduced action.

## 12. k<sup>w</sup>uy and sk<sup>w</sup>uy: Mother of a Male

k<sup>w</sup>uy means inherently diminutive, of small nature. With the u-vowel, this is not mainly a process of becoming small. It is a carried nature or relational condition. Something is small, young, reduced, lesser, cute, pitiful, humble, or foundational by role, design, or carried condition.

sk<sup>w</sup>uy means mother of a male. Structurally, this mother relation is oriented through k<sup>w</sup>uy, not as a judgment on the son’s smallness, but as a naming of the mother as the foundational one in relation to him. The nominal prefix s- frames the whole relation as a named state: she is the one who carried, began, and brought forth the male child. From the son’s perspective, sk<sup>w</sup>uy names his mother as the first holder of his life — the foundational one. Later, even if the son grows larger or stronger than his mother, the word can still carry that remembered beginning: she remains the one from whom his life first emerged.

Form	Translation / gloss	Structural interpretation
sk <sup>w</sup> uy	mother of a male	s- nominalizes the k <sup>w</sup> uy relation: the mother defined as the foundational one in relation to her son; the one who carried, began, and brought forth the male child.
ʃs k <sup>w</sup> uy	She is a mother; she has a son	The relation is held as an ongoing condition.
ʃs k <sup>w</sup> ɪsk <sup>w</sup> uy	She acts as his/the boy’s mother	The mother role is made/acted toward a male child.
k <sup>w</sup> uymys	He, first son born, made her a mother	The son’s birth realizes the mother relation through the male-child field.
sck <sup>w</sup> ɪsk <sup>w</sup> uy	foster mother of male; godmother	A made/established mother role for a male child.
sk <sup>w</sup> uk <sup>w</sup> y	paternal aunt of a male; little mother of a male	Diminutive reduplication produces a “little mother” relation.

### Relational reading

The contrast between **tuṃ** and **sk<sup>w</sup>uy** does not need to be read as hierarchy in the English social sense. It can be read as different relational anchoring. Daughterhood brings the mother’s prominence into view through **tuṃ**, “prominent of itself.” Sonship brings the mother relation into view through **sk<sup>w</sup>uy**, a nominalized whole state built from **k<sup>w</sup>uy**: the mother as the foundational one in relation to her son, the one who carried, began, and brought him forth.

## 13. The Mother Terms Side by Side

Relation	Form	Literal structural pathway	What the language is showing
female child -> mother	<b>tuṁ</b>	prominent of itself	The mother becomes prominent in relation to the daughter; the daughter makes the mother-role stand out.
first daughter born -> mother	<b>tuṁys</b>	daughter made her a mother	The first daughter realizes the mother relation.
male child -> mother	<b>sk<sup>w</sup>uy</b>	nominalized k <sup>w</sup> uy: inherently diminutive/of small nature	The mother relation is oriented through the mother as the foundational one in relation to her son — the one who carried, began, and brought him forth.
first son born -> mother	<b>k<sup>w</sup>uymys</b>	son made her a mother	The first son realizes the mother relation through the male-child field.
mother and daughter	<b>sx<sup>w</sup>lx<sup>w</sup>Itewś</b>	the living together	The relationship is not only a title; it is a lived reciprocal condition.

This side-by-side view gives the public entry its central teaching point: Salish does not only name people. It maps relation. It tells us what is prominent, what is small or young, what is carried, what is embodied, and what is lived together.

## 14. A Website Reader's Summary

For a new learner, the most important takeaway may be simple: vowels matter. They are not decorative. They are not random pronunciation pieces added to consonants. They help show how a root is oriented.

In the **tuṁ** family, the **u**-vowel gives **tuṁ**: prominence carried as part of the being or relation. This gives us a mother term for a female child, where the daughter makes the mother prominent in the relational field.

In the **k<sup>w</sup>y** family, the **u**-vowel gives **k<sup>w</sup>uy**: smallness, youth, foundational beginning, or first-stage relation carried as a nature. This gives us **sk<sup>w</sup>uy**, “*mother of a male*,” where the mother relation is oriented through the mother as the foundational one in relation to her son — the one who carried, began, and brought him forth.

Motherhood is therefore not only a title. It is an orientation carried in relationship. A mother is made visible through the child, while the child is understood through the mother who first carried, began, and brought them forth.

## 15. Mother's Day Post Text for Website Link

This Mother's Day post opened into something much larger than I originally expected.

At first, I only meant to make a short post about the words **tuṁ** and **sk<sup>w</sup>uy**.

But once I started following the relationships between the forms, the roots, and the vowels, the questions kept widening:

Why does one mother word use **tuṁ** and the other **sk<sup>w</sup>uy**?

Why is one nominalized and the other not?

Why does the **u**-vowel keep appearing in words that carry inherent or foundational relation?

Why do words as different as “mother,” “thumb,” “hero,” and “prominent being” keep returning to the same root-shell?

This is often how the work develops.

Not through a single translation,  
 but through repeated witnessing of relationships over time:  
 examples,  
 patterns,  
 speech,  
 older spellings,  
 truncated forms,  
 cultural usage,  
 and the slow realization that what first appears unrelated may actually belong to the same structural orientation.

A word first enters through familiarity.  
 Then slowly,  
 its relational field becomes visible.

Over time, large vocabularies begin collapsing inward toward root-shells, vowels, orientational patterns, and relational structure.

That process is part of what this document is showing.

Not only conclusions,  
 but the path of noticing.

The deeper Mother's Day entry follows some of that widening process through:

- **tuń** → prominence and relational centrality
- **tuńš** → socially consequential prominence
- **tuńmx<sup>w</sup>** → prominent being / hero
- **stuńčst** → thumb ("prominent finger")
- **sk<sup>w</sup>uy** → the mother as foundational one in relation to her son
- and the role of the **u-vowel** in carried, inherent, or foundational orientation.

The more I work with these forms, the less the language feels like isolated vocabulary, and the more it feels like relationships witnessing one another across words.

## 16. Support the Research

If this information has been meaningful or helpful to you, please consider supporting and following the work through the Salish Root Project. Public documents like this are made possible through long-term research, careful comparison, and community support.

### Ways to Support the Work

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The research behind this document did not emerge quickly. It represents years of continuous study, comparison, listening, questioning, organizing, testing, and rethinking how Salish structure is understood and presented.

Many of the patterns shown here only became visible after thousands of hours spent working across root families, vowel behavior, pharyngeals, morphology, orthographic systems, and spoken usage traditions. A large part of this work is not simply gathering information, but finding ways to organize and present it so learners can actually see the patterns for themselves.

Your support helps keep this research moving forward and helps make more public learning materials, videos, documents, presentations, and root-shell analysis possible through the Salish Root Project.

## Working Research Note

This entry represents ongoing Salish Root Project analysis based on long-term listening, dictionary work, root comparison, elder translations, speaker-confirmed glosses, and structural patterning. The descriptions are working interpretations meant to help learners see the deeper organization of the language. They remain open to refinement as more examples, memories, recordings, and speaker knowledge are brought into the discussion.