

**A LANGUAGE SURVEY OF NORTHERN MÉTIS LANGUAGES: A  
COMMUNITY-BASED LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION PROJECT**

by

Susan Jane Saunders  
B.Sc., University of Victoria, 2011

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in the Department of Linguistics

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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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The purpose of the thesis is two-fold: to document the results of a language survey of Northern Métis languages which examines the language practices and attitudes of those Northern Métis people who participated, and to reflect upon the research process by examining the assumptions I bring to the research and my role and the role of other Masters level researchers in language revitalization projects. The research presented here has been conducted within the Community-based language revitalization (CBLR) research model (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009), a model which can be a powerful way to frame linguistic research and which is increasingly called upon when undertaking language revitalization projects. This thesis addresses the application of CBLR practices to a language revitalization project undertaken in collaboration with the North Slave Métis Alliance in the Northwest Territories, Canada. Along with positioning myself in the research, I provide an in-depth description of the historical, political, and social landscape in which the research takes place. My epistemologies and the CBLR model are informed by feminist and Native American methodologies, as well as participatory, participatory-action and action frameworks. Through this lens, I reflect on the academic context of language revitalization and offer my own model of collaborative language research which builds upon work done by Leonard & Haynes (2010). Applying this model, I present the results of the North Slave Métis Language Survey, conducted in 2013 in collaboration with the North Slave Métis Alliance. This thesis contributes to the body of work on Métis languages, and is the

first to thoroughly examine and document the language practices of Métis people of the NWT. It also contributes to the growing body of work on CBLR research.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Figures .....	vii
Definitions.....	viii
Acronyms and Alphabetisms .....	x
Acknowledgements.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
<b>1.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 My story .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.3 Approval process, research relationships, funding.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.4 Challenges.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Chapter 2: Context and Rationale .....	18
<b>2.1 Physical context: Historical, geographical, and political landscape of Métis north of 60° .....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1.1 Northern Métis beginnings .....	20
2.1.2 Northern Métis and treaties, scrip, & land claims .....	22
2.1.3 The birth of the North Slave Métis Alliance.....	25
<b>2.2 The historic languages of Métis north of 60° .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.3 North Slave Métis voices .....</b>	<b>31</b>
2.3.1 The usurpation of Indigenous lands .....	31
2.3.2 The destruction of Indigenous habitats .....	32
2.3.3 The involuntary incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the larger society (generally into the lower-class margins of that society) .....	34
<b>2.4 Summary of Context and Rationale.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods .....	38
<b>3.1 Epistemology and Methodologies .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1.1 Participatory, participatory-action, action, and interaction frameworks.....	40
3.1.2 Feminist and Native American methodologies.....	41
3.1.3 Grounded Theory .....	41
3.1.4 Reflections on Methodologies .....	42
<b>3.2 Academia and language revitalization efforts.....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.2.1 Community-Based Language Research and Collaborative methods .....	43
3.2.2 Notes and thoughts on collaborative frameworks.....	46
3.2.3 In which we move from <i>Collaborations</i> to <i>Relations</i> .....	50
3.2.4 Summary of academic context of language revitalization .....	54
<b>3.3 The academic study of Métis languages.....</b>	<b>55</b>
3.3.1 Michif.....	56
3.3.2 Michif-French / Métis-French / French .....	58
3.3.3 Cree other aboriginal languages.....	59
3.3.4 Bungi.....	59
3.3.5 English .....	60

<b>3.4 North Slave Métis Language Survey Methods</b> .....	<b>60</b>
3.4.1 Interview methods.....	61
3.4.2 Relational sampling .....	63
3.4.3 Analysis methods .....	64
<b>3.5 Summary of Methodology and Methods</b> .....	<b>65</b>
Chapter 4: Reflexivity Reprise.....	66
<b>4.1 A few of my own reflections</b> .....	<b>67</b>
Part 1: Ethics .....	67
Part 2: Lunch at the Snowshoe Inn .....	68
Part 3: Writing.....	69
<b>4.2 From theory to practice</b> .....	<b>70</b>
Chapter 5: The North Slave Métis Language Survey .....	72
<b>5.1 Description of the Northern Métis language</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>5.2 Where is the Northern Métis language spoken?</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>5.3 Identity</b> .....	<b>81</b>
<b>5.4 Movement and Migration</b> .....	<b>86</b>
<b>5.5 Language shift</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>5.6 Prognosis for the Northern Métis language</b> .....	<b>94</b>
<b>5.7 Language Revitalization efforts, what comes next?</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>5.8 Who plays a role?</b> .....	<b>101</b>
<b>5.9 Outcomes and deliverables</b> .....	<b>102</b>
Chapter 6: Survey Summary, Discussion & Recommendations .....	105
<b>6.1 Summary of themes</b> .....	<b>105</b>
6.1.1 Description of the Northern Métis language.....	105
6.1.2 Where is the Northern Métis language spoken? .....	106
6.1.3 Identity .....	107
6.1.4 Movement and Migration .....	107
6.1.5 Language Shift .....	108
6.1.6 Prognosis for the Northern Métis language .....	109
6.1.7 Language Revitalization efforts, what comes next? .....	109
6.1.8 Who plays a role?.....	110
6.1.9 Outcomes and deliverables .....	110
<b>6.2 Discussion</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>6.3 Recommendations</b> .....	<b>114</b>
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	117
<b>7.1 Northern Métis language Survey</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<b>7.2 ...and our stories will go on into the future</b> .....	<b>118</b>
Bibliography .....	121
Appendices.....	133
<b>Appendix 1 – Interview Questionnaire</b> .....	<b>133</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Community Information letter</b> .....	<b>138</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Interview transcripts</b> .....	<b>139</b>
<b>Appendix 5 – Draft Poster presentation for use on presenting findings</b> .....	<b>140</b>
<b>Appendix 6 – Language Surveys</b> .....	<b>141</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Métis Communities in the Northern Mackenzie Basin (Métis Heritage Association of the Northwest Territories, 1998, p. 4).....	22
Figure 2: The lands covered by Treaty 8 and Treaty 11 (Fumoleau, 1973, p. 315) .....	23
Figure 3: GNWT reporting average income in the Community and Diamonds report. (GNWT, 2014, p.29) .....	35
Figure 4: Leonard & Haynes (2010) Model of Truly Collaborative Fieldwork (p. 288) .....	47
Figure 5: Proposed Model of Truly Collaborative Fieldwork. Illustrating partnerships that extend beyond connections solely made through “the project” .....	49
Figure 6: Stebbins’ (2012) three fields of knowledge (p. 308).....	55
Figure 7: Map of the Northwest Territories, with community names (NWT Bureau of Statistics) .....	78

## Definitions

**Aboriginal** – First Nation, Inuit, or Métis people who are Indigenous to a region of the present day Canada

**Indigenous** – native to a specific region; globally, regionally, or locally

**Language Revitalization (LR)** – LR efforts were triggered by a historically recent realization that of the 6000+ languages once spoken across the globe, perhaps in 100 years 90% will disappear (Baker, 2006). LR stems from the desire of Indigenous community members to see their languages and cultures survive, as well as work done by scholars that addresses language loss (Hermes, Bang, & Marin, 2012). LR has been referred to as a *movement* and efforts aim to both slow down, stop, or reverse the decline of a language, as well as educate, empower, or mobilize Indigenous communities (Hermes, Bang, & Marin, 2012). LR efforts are broad, but all attempt to instill vitality into languages that are being lost and directly address language shift. For the purpose of this thesis, LR refers to *any* activity that sheds light on a language which is undergoing language shift, and the LR tool that is primarily focused on in this thesis is Language Surveys. Language Surveys are a LR tool that can be used to contribute to a community's understanding of their language and are often the first step of LR efforts (Hinton, 2001b). Through LR efforts, community members, all levels of government (community, aboriginal, territorial, provincial, and federal), and the public are armed with the information needed to make strategy, plans and informed decisions with regard to language planning and policy.



**Language Shift** – the process where a cultural community moves from speaking one language to another language

**Reversing Language Shift** – For the purpose of this thesis, RLS refers to any activity that attempts to slow down, stop or reverse the decline of a language. The distinction between LR and RLS lies in the difference between strategy and action. All efforts to reverse language shift, are language revitalization efforts, but not all Language Revitalization efforts will result directly in reversing language shift.

**Métis** – For the purpose of this thesis, Métis refers to a group of people of common cultural and historical heritage who share a distinct, collective social identity, based on ancestry, language, a sense of place, religion, and social & economic roles, and have lived together in the same vast regions with a common way of existence identifiable prior to effective European control

**Michif, Métis-French, French, Cree, Bungee, and other Métis languages** – See §3.3

**Northern Métis** – Métis Indigenous to the Northwest Territories

**Northern Métis language** – I will use this as the term to refer to the language specific to the Métis of the Northwest Territories. Note that I am not calling it Métis-French, or Michif. Further structural analysis is needed to determine its similarity and differences to other Métis languages.

## **Acronyms and Alphabetisms**

**CBLR** – Community Based Language Revitalization

**DDMI** – Diavik Diamond Mines Incorporated

**GNWT** – Government of the Northwest Territories

**IBA** – Impact Benefit Agreement

**LR** – Language Revitalization

**NSMA** – North Slave Métis Alliance

**NWT** – Northwest Territories

**RFF** – Relational Flow Frames

**RLS** – Reversing Language Shift

**SCROLA** – Special Committee on the Review of the Official Languages Act

**SEA** – Socio-Economic Agreement

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

*“In following out this plan I naturally passed through a great deal of new country, and discovered, as we white men say when we are pointed out some geographical feature by an Indian who has been familiar with it since childhood, many lakes and small streams never before visited...”*

*Warburton Pike, 1917  
Barren Ground of Northern Canada, p. iiv*

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is based on a survey of the language practices and attitudes of a Métis community in the North Slave region of the Northwest Territories (NWT) at a time when the language spoken by the community is undergoing language shift and there is a desire by the community to revitalize the language. The purpose of the thesis is two-fold. First, this thesis thematically documents the results of the language survey through the voices of community members and in so doing provides empirical information on the Northern Métis languages and language history. Secondly, the thesis aims to document and reflect upon the process of working within a northern Métis community while administering a language survey. Through critical reflection I will not only better understand my role in *this* work, but will also contribute to the broader understanding of language shift and endangerment by illustrating how I have applied feminist and Indigenous methodologies and the community-based language revitalization model (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009) to conducting a language survey.

In October 2012, the president of the North Slave Métis Alliance (NSMA), Bill Enge, and I met to discuss the prospects of working together on a project that would focus on the NSMA community's traditional language, and therefore provide documentation of an aspect of their linguistic history. What exactly that would entail was not initially decided, although I knew

it would fit into the realm of language revitalization, and, as “the linguist” in the relationship, it was left to be my responsibility to provide an informed decision on what to do next. While talking to Métis people in the region prior to beginning the research, I quickly learned that NSMA members are aware that their traditional language is undergoing language shift, as many young people are increasingly speaking English as a first or only language. Community members had previously expressed interest in looking at ways to bring their language back into their community, but, prior to this thesis research, the language practices, including the physical number of speakers, and the language attitudes of the North Slave Métis Alliance members, have not been examined as a whole. This project is the first to extensively examine the use of traditional Métis languages in a Métis community in the Northwest Territories. In the context of this thesis, Métis refers to a group of people of common cultural and historical heritage who share a distinct, collective social identity, have lived together in the same vast regions with a common way of existence identifiable prior to effective European control<sup>1</sup>.

Language Revitalization (LR) efforts aim to broaden the body of knowledge on a language which is undergoing language shift and often attempt to reverse language shift by slowing down, stopping, or reversing the shift from an Indigenous language to a non-Indigenous language (Hermes, Bang, & Marin, 2012). LR and reversing language shift (RLS) go hand-in-hand. Language revitalization efforts take place in different realms, and are undertaken, for example, by an individual, family, or community. They can be very focused, or very broad. I had a lot to research, and ultimately, to decide. Based on Fishman’s (1991) eight steps to RLS, an essential first step of RLS is to assess the state of language and conduct subsequent language

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<sup>1</sup> Effective European control is 1921, and relates to the signing of treaty 11 (refer to §2.1.2 *Northern Métis and treaties, scrip, & land claims*)

planning. Language planning lays the foundation for future language revitalization efforts. This would be a good place to begin for the NSMA.

At the time of the project, there had been no academic research that focused on the languages of Métis people in the Northwest Territories, and I was curious and excited to take on this task<sup>2</sup>. The language of Northern Métis is also the only language of an Aboriginal group Indigenous to the NWT that has not been granted official status recognized by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), which adds to the complexity of researching the language. The first step in this project would be to examine Métis community members' a) use of, and, b) attitudes toward, the language that is Indigenous to Métis people of the North Slave Métis community. This would be done by administering a language survey. Language surveys act as important initial step in language planning and language revitalization (Hinton, 2001b). Surveys can inform the community of the level of interest in future language revitalization projects, and the resources already available within the community for undertaking any future language revitalization projects. The survey, then, became a tool to scope out the future of language revitalization in this specific community. While the goals of this project are not trivial, this particular project is topically focused, such that it is solely concerned with conducting a language survey. In the future, with the knowledge gained from this study, there is a potential for the community to decide how it wants to proceed with its language goals and whether a larger multi-disciplinary team is something they want and need in their language revitalization efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> All prior research on Métis languages has been commissioned by the Government of the Northwest Territories, and some references to Métis languages can be found in a few government documents (i.e. GNWT, 2003; SCROLA, 2003; GNWT, 1993)

Throughout the research process I spoke to nearly 30 individuals, many of whom spoke the traditional language. The qualitative evidence gathered through interviews in this thesis would suggest that the language is more similar to French (a language with origins in the present day Europe) than to Michif (a language with origins in North America). This is further supported by the fact that I was able to understand some of what was said when one participant provided a short elicitation in their language, even with my rudimentary knowledge of French (through French immersion education). Because there was only one elicitation, I am hesitant to use the term French, or Michif as a name for the language. Furthermore, participants referred to the language by both names. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I will use the term Northern Métis language to refer to the unique variety of language that has been, and continues to be spoken, in Métis families. I hope that by using this term, it reflects that the language is not mine to name, but the North Slave Métis community's. A structural analysis of the language is needed to clarify its relation to French. Regardless, it is safe to say that it is the language that was traditionally spoken by many Métis families in the North Slave region.

This thesis is designed for a variety of audiences. First, for the North Slave Métis Alliance, and the Northern Métis community as a whole, as written documentation of research on the language practices and attitudes of Northern Métis. Second, for the academic community who are engaged in research on Métis languages, Northern Métis history, and/or Métis identity, and finally, for those who make decisions on languages in the Northwest Territories which directly impact the Northern Métis community. With that being said, please feel welcome to read this thesis in any order you like, skip over chapters and sections as desired, or only select chapters or sections that are significant to your needs. I have attempted to allow chapters, and



even sections of chapters to stand alone. If context is necessary, I will refer the reader back to the appropriate section to gain context.

In the remainder of Chapter 1, I provide personal context, by telling my story (§1.2 *My story*), then I go on to discuss the approval process, research relationships, and project funding (§1.3 *Approval process, research relationships, funding*), and finally, §1.4 *Challenges* looks at the challenges which preface this research. Chapter 2: *Context and Rationale*, provides a detailed look at the physical context and rationale of this thesis. Chapter 3: *Methodology and Methods*, describes my guiding research methodologies, outlines the academic context of language revitalization and Métis language research, and finished by providing the methods and steps followed while undertaking the North Slave Métis Language Survey. I pause in Chapter 4: *Reflexivity Reprise*, to take a critical reflexive look at how the methodologies and methods have applied to my research, and reflect on three moments that stand out for me. Chapter 5: *The North Slave Métis Language Survey*, presents the results of the survey through Métis voices of participants interviewed organized into themes which arose in our conversations. In Chapter 6: *Survey Summary, Discussion & Recommendations*, I present a summary of the results and discuss the implications of this project and provide a few recommendations going forward. Finally, I provide the concluding remarks in Chapter 7.

## **1.2 My story**

Indigenous research methodologies stress that part of doing research in an Indigenous context is situating yourself (Wilson, 2004; Thompson, 2008). I will begin by doing just so. I struggle with the standard response of “I am a non-Indigenous Canadian of European descent” or “Settler Canadian”, both of which are commonplace phrases found in this section of academic papers

chronicling non-Indigenous scholar's research. What has been role-modeled to me throughout my childhood and academic journey is to see a person for who they are and the actions that they take, not merely their ethnic history. If I were to describe myself as a non-Indigenous Canadian of European descent, the reader knows nothing more about who I am or how I arrived *here*, writing this thesis. What I do feel is important to take note of, though, is that I am an outsider to the community with which I am working. This has implications for my relationship with the research material. I wanted to better situate myself for you, the reader, but I didn't know how to go about doing it.

A Métis colleague advised me when developing the survey to ask participants "Who were your grandparents?" as a way of introduction. In this question, the participants would then be able to situate themselves within the Northern Métis community. I could see family relations between individuals I interviewed, and make connections to where their families came from; their geographical, and linguistic heritage. The answer to how to situate myself came to me clearly one day; to begin to tell my story, I needed to answer the same question I was advised to ask, "*Who were my grandparents?*"

On my mother's side, my grandmother was Marguerite Hammond, born in Elmira, Ontario; one of 8 children, or so, to a farming family. Her mother died when she was young during the birth of another sibling. Her father was unable to attend to the farm and the children, and she moved to Kitchener, Ontario as a young woman to work as a helper for a doctor. My grandfather was Bruce Russell Peterson. His mother, my great-grandmother, was from Kitchener, Ontario, but my grandfather was born in Detroit, Michigan; I think his dad may have been American. Regardless, his mother divorced his father when he and his brother were toddlers, and came back to Kitchener with her two sons to live next door to her parents. On my

father's side, my grandmother, Alice Isabel Cruickshank, was born in Herschel, Saskatchewan in 1916. My dad remembers visiting his grandparents' house twice as a child, and on long kayak trips, he tells me stories of him and his siblings playing at his mom's family's farm house. My grandfather was Robert Belmont Saunders, born in Stettler, Alberta, December 1915. His family moved to Edmonton when he was just a kid. That is about all I know of my family history, and I will admit that I had to ask my parents about these details, even.

It's not that I was not close to my grandparents growing up. My grandparents on my mother's side retired to Peachland, British Columbia where we spent countless long weekends and summers playing at their house. They had the biggest garden in their backyard high on the hill overlooking Lake Okanagan which had row upon row of raspberry bushes. At home in Calgary, we would wait patiently for packages to come in the mail of the most delicious fruit leather made by my Grandma Marg. And there wasn't a kinder man in the world than my Grandpa Bruce. My Grandma Alice and Grandpa Bob moved to Calgary when my father was a young boy. My own parents met and married in Calgary, so these grandparents were always close by. While my parents worked, I would go to their house instead of day care. I learned how to ride a bike in their driveway. They had five rain barrels in their backyard that were staggered, and when one was full, it would drain into the second, and so on. They would water their whole yard with this water, which is probably why they always had the brightest and best flowers on the street. I would relish picking a bouquet of snap dragons from their garden, and pretend to make them talk to each other, tenderly hinging their jaws with a light pinch of my fingers. The tools in their garage were always organized, and a tennis ball hung from the ceiling, so my grandfather would know exactly how far to pull his beige Ford Crown Victoria into the garage. My grandmother never had a driver's license. Together they would do the daily New York Times

crossword from the Calgary Herald, even the Sunday crossword wouldn't stump them. They were as sharp as a tack until the day they died, a week or two apart.

This is who I come from. I can't tell you much more about my history than past my grandparents. They never recounted stories of their childhood as I sat on their knee. I never heard about places they came from; they were all born in Canada, and I suspect none of them had too deep of roots in the place they were born, as all of them drifted from place to place, all of them living for some time in more than one province, and even more cities.

Through doing research on Métis language and culture, I reflexively became more and more curious about my own cultural and linguistic history. What language, if not English, did my ancestors speak? What land did they live on? Did they breathe salty sea air, or cool highland air? I attempted to do some genealogy research into my family tree, but there are many gaps and dead ends, with only one leading me out of Canada; my great-grandfather. My Grandma Alice's father emigrated from Scotland. I asked my father about his accent, which he didn't remember; he only met his grandfather twice before he died in Saskatoon. All my other family back to my great-great-grandparents were in Canada. A few genealogy lines go a generation or two further back, but none tell me *where* I am from. A history of migrating people, each generation never seeming to *settle*, always moving to a place different from where their parents were born. (Will this tradition ever end?)

My parents stayed in Calgary because my father fell in love with the mountains when, at 19 years old, he summited a mountain for the first time. It was Mount Athabasca (I know because both my brother and I climbed it when we were nineteen, respectively, as a rite of passage – like my father), and after that climb, he was hooked. Hike, cross-country ski, climb, mountaineer, scramble; anything to get him in the mountains. He has climbed over 700 of the

Rocky Mountains, many of them first ascents. I inevitably also spent time in the mountains as a child. I developed a passion for rock climbing, but I never felt like the mountains were my home the same way that they are my dad's home. When I was 6, my dad took a summer off from the mountains to do a 6-month ski-kayak-hike traverse of Baffin Island. This is when I first learned about a part of Canada that was unlike anything I had ever experienced. Snow and ice, rocks and lichens, no trees and Inuit. Frozen lakes and frozen ocean, whale bones and Arctic Terns. For school projects I developed a pattern of choosing to research the Arctic bio-region. I would paste the photos that my dad captured to a poster, present it to my class, and imagine what it would be like to be there. I didn't know then how my relationship with the north would grow and the directions it would take.

My mother had a long career as a teacher, working with students from a variety of different backgrounds, with a variety of different abilities. My vision of my mother is one of an incredibly accepting individual. In her work as a teacher, she dedicated herself fully to some of the most vulnerable cross-sections of Calgary's youth. While my dad was on the Baffin Island expedition, we needed a nanny. Instead of advertising the position, my mom spoke to her friend who was a principal at another alternative school, knowing that some of the students may need a change of pace from their home life. Through this connection, we met Maaikke. She was the best nanny in the entire world. My mom immediately could see all the beauty within her and looked beyond what other teachers saw, and invited her to live in our house to help take care of my brother and I while my dad was away on a long expedition. It was through my mom that I learned to see everyone, regardless of their background and circumstances, for who they truly are, another human, just like me.

It was during Christmas after my first semester of university that my dad suggested I come paddling with him on a leg of an ambitious paddling trip he and his friend had dreamed up, and started the year before. The idea was to bike from Calgary to Jasper, paddle to Yellowknife, continue paddling to Hudson Bay and loop back along the Arctic coastline and somehow make it back to Yellowknife. The details were not yet ironed out, but the year previous they had made it to Yellowknife, and were eager to keep going. So, when I was 20 years old, I ventured into the sub-arctic for the first time. In that life changing summer, we paddled from Yellowknife to Chesterfield Inlet. The following year, I was attending university in Singapore, but dad and Chris continued up the coast to Repulse Bay. Back in Canada, I re-joined them on the remaining three legs of the trip, paddling from Yellowknife to Kugluktuk, Nunavut via Great Bear Lake, then on to Taloyoak, along the Arctic coast, then continuing on to Repulse Bay, now called Nauyasat, to complete the loop (not quite complete for me!). I developed a deep connection to the land and the water over the thousands, upon thousands, upon thousands of kilometers we travelled across the territories. If my father had found his home in the mountains so many years ago, I had found mine in the Canadian sub-arctic.

Back at the University of Victoria studying linguistics, my mind was almost always north. The arctic is often described as barren, and expanse of lakes, and land, uninhabited, but from my experience, it is far from that. Around every corner, it seems, there is evidence of man. A fox-trap here, a tent circle there, a rock cache, or a gravesite. I also knew first-hand the extent of the bio-diversity of the arctic. I had counted bird species, documented flowers and grasses, and had traveled over an ever changing landscape; from forest to tundra, through bogs and over boulder fields, down swift rivers, and through mazes of blue icebergs. And, I had been

graciously hosted and greeted by Nunavummiut and Tłı̨chǫ people as I paddled through many of their communities. To me, I knew that life flourishes in the arctic.

When I began to learn about Indigenous languages in school, I couldn't help but think of the people I met, and the land on which I had travelled. I imagined a vocabulary specific to the land that I had grown to love. I imagined being in the tent rings where I had sat in the summer months before, some so old they were almost covered completely by dirt and moss, and I thought of the conversations that took place in the tent ring when a *tuktu* hide made the tent. I thought of the ways the people would communicate with the land and water, and the words that they would use. Would they have thanked the sun for its warmth, or asked aloud to the river for safe passage, or to the wind to be favourable on long crossing, like I find myself doing on a long trip? Were there words to describe the different flavours of water we found to drink; water from rushing rivers, small tributaries, and silt-y rivers? Water from unnamed ponds, or from lakes so big you can't see the other side, or sometimes from rain puddles collected in natural bowls in the rock of the Canadian Shield? Was there a word for my favourite flavour of water; water from puddles of melted sea ice on the Arctic Ocean, deliciously ever-so-slightly-salted water? Coming from a place where water usually comes out of a tap, we only need one word. Could there be words to describe these other flavours I have come to know?

In my travels, I also saw evidence of changes in the arctic, and in my university lectures I thought of those places too. I have travelled routes of famous explorers and to places where the first white people travelled in the north, each of whom needed the assistance, knowledge, and translation services of Dene, Métis, and Inuit guides who knew the waterways, and how to hunt and live off this land. Their old over-winter camps seem out of place; remainders of buildings made of rock, chimney stacks, or houses built from wood brought in from down south; anyone

from here would know that rock is not a good insulator, and would be too cold for the winter, and not conducive to a nomadic life. I imagined paddling into remote Hudson's Bay posts that I had visited, now abandoned, and the conversations that would have taken place there, had I arrived when it was in full operation. I thought about the people who were settled in communities by the government, and their living rooms, and the languages spoken in them, and the conversations I had with them in those warm spaces.

When the time came to move to Yellowknife, I didn't need to think twice. We packed our apartment in Victoria, B.C. and moved here. Eric, my partner, had just finished his thesis, and I was mid-Master's. I had finished my coursework, but had not yet found a project to work on. We had no reason to stay in Victoria, and not any other reason to move north than a magnetic pull. It wasn't long after moving here, that I met with the North Slave Métis Alliance, and a research relationship was formed. For me, this was perfect, as I was living and doing research in the same area. I would be able to create meaningful, lasting relationships with my colleagues that could develop into something further in the future, as I was at home.

### **1.3 Approval process, research relationships, funding**

Once the North Slave Métis Alliance gave me permission to go ahead with this research, I still needed to seek approval from other agencies. Any research that takes place in the Northwest Territories must be approved by the Aurora Research Institute. This is an online application, which is valid only until December 31<sup>st</sup> of any calendar year. I received approval from the Aurora Research institute to conduct my research during 2013. I also received ethics approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board.



It was important to create strong relationships with my research partners at the North Slave Métis Alliance, and the broader Métis community. Being a small organization with many other projects on the go, there was not a lot of extra time for the NSMA to contribute to this project, but the NSMA offered a financial contribution to cover the costs of honorarium, travel, and other project related expenses. Therefore, I sought out research relationships with Métis researchers who were interested in language and Métis culture who had the time to work with me on this project. Having some project money from the North Slave Métis Alliance, I consulted with two Métis researchers: Ryan Mercredi was integral in his input in the development of the survey, and getting the project going, and Stefany Bulmer was trained to conduct interviews with me, and was incredibly kind and helpful in introducing me to her community members and bridging the gap between interviewer and interviewee.

Already, we can see two fundamentally different kinds of relationships a researcher can have with the community: one through funding, and another through interactions. As the project progressed, these relationships became increasingly intertwined as I paid the researchers project money. It was important for everyone involved to clearly situate their role in the project, what everyone's own expectations were of themselves, and of each other.

## **1.4 Challenges**

It is important to realize that this thesis is defined by the views expressed by a selection of Métis people living in the Northwest Territories, whose families primarily are from areas on the Great Slave Lake, Slave River, and southern shores of *Grande Rivière* (Northern Métis language) /

*Dehcho* (Tłıchǫ and Slavey) / Mackenzie River (English)<sup>3</sup> (Government of Northwest Territories, 2015). This research does not necessarily directly reflect the Aboriginal experience across Canada. This research also cannot be extended to the linguistic situation of other Métis communities in other parts of Canada, or even all Métis of the Northwest Territories. The thesis looks at the common themes brought forth by those people who were interviewed. The themes explored by participants were far vaster than could be covered in a single thesis. The focus of this thesis, then, is limited to the common themes expressed by the people who were interviewed.

In doing this research, there were two challenges which I continually revisited and questioned throughout the project, and for which I never found a concrete answer, as perhaps one does not exist. First, there is the question of who Métis<sup>4</sup> people are, and how this decision is made, both in Canada and in the Northwest Territories<sup>5</sup>. Is the decision made by the Canadian federal government? The Northwest Territories territorial government? Or is it a matter of individual identity? Can one identify as both Métis and Dene? Clearly, from a standpoint of individual identity, yes, but what about from a political perspective? In the eyes of the federal government, with regard to settled land claims, you cannot be a member of the North Slave Métis Alliance and a member of another Aboriginal organization in the Northwest Territories that has a settled claim. It is not uncommon, though, to meet people who have one parent who is Métis and one who is Dene, but, under federal law and land claim settlements, these individuals cannot be both Métis and Dene. Even if that more accurately reflects their individual identity;

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<sup>3</sup> See March 3, 2015 GNWT statement on official names of the Mackenzie River by Education, Culture and Employment Minister Jackson Lafferty: Mackenzie River Names (<http://news.exec.gov.nt.ca/jackson-lafferty-mackenzie-river-names/>)

<sup>4</sup> Note that in §1.1 *Introduction* defined Métis as: “a group of people of common cultural and historical heritage who share a distinct, collective social identity, have lived together in the same vast regions with a common way of existence identifiable prior to effective European control.”

<sup>5</sup> Refer also to §2.1.2 *Northern Métis and treaties, scrip, & land claims* for more detail on this question.

they must choose to affiliate with one group. The structures that are instilled by the government are designed to categorize people based on ethnicity, and make people decide what cultural group with which to affiliate. Furthermore, the Métis situation is unique compared with other ethnic and cultural groups. Typically, most ethnic groups share a geographic homeland, speak a common language, have a common culture, and share a history. This is not the case for Métis people who live in a variety of bio-regions across Canada, and have a variety of languages (Bakker, 1997). How I decided to answer the question “Who is Métis?” would have implications for my research: would I only speak with people who are members of the North Slave Métis Alliance (Métis from a political, and individual point of view), or, would I speak to people who are part of another Aboriginal organization<sup>6</sup>, but self-identify as Métis. Because of how I was introduced to participants, I decided to be open to interviewing anyone who I was recommended to speak with, as even if they are not Métis in the eyes of the federal government, and have chosen to affiliate with an Aboriginal organization that is culturally Dene based, they may have Métis ancestry, and self-identify as Métis.

The second major question and issue that kept arising was what to call the language I was studying. I know that naming something is a powerful act, one which in this case I do not feel qualified to do. I also understand that what the language is called could potentially have resounding implications on the status and general understanding of the language in the Northwest Territories. I am not an expert in any of these realms, so I decided to approach the subject with an open mind. I asked those who I spoke with what they called the language, and

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<sup>6</sup> There are currently seven Aboriginal organizations recognized by the Government of the Northwest Territories who have, or are working toward, self-governance: Tłı̨chǫ Government, Akaitcho Territory Government, Sahtu Secretariat, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Dehcho First Nations, NWT Métis Nation, and Gwich'in Tribal Council. The North Slave Métis Alliance is not one of these groups.

tried to refer to it in interviews with the name that my interlocutor decided to use. When I present the voices of community member, I use the term that they use. I have begun to understand the myriad factors that have contributed to the language having many names, and can appreciate the diversity within this. However, in this thesis, I felt it is necessary to refer to the language using one term. Therefore, in this thesis I have chosen to use what I hope is a more neutral name that reflects that it is *the language of the people*, so when speaking generally about the language, I refer to it as the Northern Métis language. At the end of the thesis, I provide a recommendation that the language community itself decide if they want to collectively choose a name that reflects the language they speak.

The quandary of what to call it, and the multitude of names by which it is referenced, is perhaps rooted in the origin of the word “Métis”:

The name of the people and the language is *Métis*, *Mitif*, and *Metif*, pronounced as *Michif*, which means “mixed.” All three variants are the same word, *Mitif* being the oldest (Trudel, 1960). The word is related to *Mestizo*, a person of mixed ancestry. (Bakker, 1997, p. 52)

The word Michif, then, can refer to both the people, and the language. We know that Métis people speak a variety of languages, though, so, if Métis people themselves are using the word Michif, are they referring to the language, or are they referring to the name of the people? At times it is clear what they are referring to, like the following passage of a Métis voyageur speaking to Petitot:

*Pardon père, je ne s'is pas Français de France, mòe, ni Canayen. Je s'is t'un mitif, et ma mere est une chauvagesse directe.* (Excuse me, Father, but I am not a Frenchman from France, nor a French Canadian, I am a Mitif, and my mother is a full blood Indian.) (Petitot 1887, in Payment, 1998, p. 68)

Unfortunately, many references to Michif and Métis languages that one comes across when reading academic literature on Métis history and Métis anthropology are more ambiguous. It is almost impossible to know exactly what someone is referring to when they speak about Métis languages. In this example, written by historian Martha McCarthy, note the number of

ambiguous terms used to describing the Métis language in one sentence; “Country French”, Michif, mixed, trade jargon, Dene words, “tool of communication”:

“The southern Métis spoke a *country French*, *Michif*, which, though *mixed* with *trade jargon* and *Dene words*, functioned as a *tool of a communication* with the Oblate priests.” (McCarthy, 1998, p. 123)

The ambiguity is also reflected by Paul Chartrand:

There is NOT one ‘Michif’ language or dialect, as is often stated or written. ‘Michif’ or ‘Michiss’ is only the pronunciation of the word ‘Métis’ as spoken by our people; it is NOT a word that can denote a singular language. If an outside researcher asks any Métis what language he or she speaks, he is likely to get the reply ‘Michif’, just as the French say they speak French and the English say they speak English. That says nothing about the content of the spoken language. It is simply not completely correct to state, as is often done, that Michif is a language that combines Cree verbs and French nouns. For some people and for some communities, that is the case. But not for all Michif people. (Lavallée, 2003, p. xi, in Papen, 2009)

Before beginning this research, I had never heard the language spoken by Métis people in this region. I was trying to gain some understanding through written and oral descriptions of “the language that was spoken by Métis in the region”. In talking to people, I heard it called a few names. To further add to my confusion, I had read varying names for it including Michif, Michif-French, Métis-French, convent French, and simply French (see §2.2 *The historic languages of Métis north of 60°* for more details). Academics who work on Métis languages urged me to call it Métis-French, but I heard community members calling it other names. I found myself conflicted. This challenge is rooted in the fact that academic literature has not yet drawn this distinction.

## Chapter 2: Context and Rationale

In this chapter I describe the physical context of this thesis through reviewing and synthesizing previous academic and historical writing. I look at the historical and political landscape of Métis Northwest Territories in §2.1. Following in §2.2 *The historic languages of Métis north of 60°* I provide rationale behind undertaking this Community-Based Language Revitalization project by looking at previous documentation of Northern Métis languages in the NWT by historians, anthropologists, academics and first hand documentation of the language through accounts found in explorer's and missionary's journals. This aims to situate the reader in the languages of the Métis north of 60° by looking at how historical documents described the language of the Métis who were living in this region. Finally, in §2.3 *North Slave Métis voices*, I present some modern day Métis voices gathered by a previous research project undertaken by the North Slave Métis Alliance. I situate the voices documented by the NSMA's report within Hinton's (Hinton, 2001a) quote: "the loss of Indigenous languages is tied closely to the usurpation of Indigenous lands, the destruction of Indigenous habitats, and the involuntary incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the larger society (generally into the lower-class margins of that society)" (p. 4).

### **2.1 Physical context: Historical, geographical, and political landscape of Métis north of 60°**

A Métis community in the Northwest Territories is the backdrop of the historical, geographical, political, and linguistic landscape of this project. To gain perspective on the unique circumstances of this community, I attempt to situate the reader in the physical context of this research by providing a thorough discussion on and history of Métis people in this region. It is my primary goal that through this exercise, the reader will begin to consider the palimpsest of

complexities that are embedded in attempting to define and categorize a group of people – especially so when this becomes necessary to fit people into political structures and realities created by authorities that are removed from the local landscape. I briefly touched upon this issue when I discussed the challenges of this study in §1.4 *Challenges*. This section reveals the root of some of these challenges in more detail.

To address these complexities, I begin by presenting a review of the literature on Métis people in the Great Slave Lake area in §2.1.1 *Northern Métis beginnings*. This is informed mainly by research compiled by historians and anthropologists documented in the book *Picking Up The Threads: Métis history in in the Mackenzie Basin* (Métis Heritage Association of the Northwest Territories, 1998), and historian Gwynneth Jones' (2005) report prepared for the Department of Justice Canada titled *Historical Profile of the Great Slave Lake Area's Mixed European-Indian Ancestry Community*. It must be mentioned that both these documents are influenced by primary source data including travel journals of explorers, accounts of financial transactions at a trade post, or reports from missionaries. While these documents contain *stories of* Métis people, they are always written from the perspective of a (male) author of European descent. There exist no first-hand accounts or ethnographies documented by the earliest Métis people in this region. The sources were written when and where the author was, and therefore large periods of space and time in history are missing, and these documents show only a slice of Métis life. I then show how treaty and scrip have affected the lives of North Slave Métis (§2.1.2 *Northern Métis and treaties, scrip, & land claims*), and finally, I will discuss the birth of the North Slave Métis Alliance, and some of their contemporary history (§2.1.3 *The birth of the North Slave Métis Alliance*). In reading this section, you will find that northern Métis identity and history is a complex phenomenon that could generate great amounts of further discussion.

### 2.1.1 Northern Métis beginnings

Métis people have a mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry. Métis identity and culture, though, did not simply come into existence when the first child of mixed ancestry was born in eastern Canada, where contact first took place. In the early days of these mixed unions (c. early 1700s), as long as children of mixed-heritage were baptized, they were considered members of the French settler community of their father, and through their mother, they grew up with strong ties to their Aboriginal traditions and languages (Devine, 1998). There was “a symbiotic relationship” between the two groups, and there were few barriers stopping them from assimilating into either parent’s community, and there were few advantages in maintaining a separate Métis identity. Eventually, though, the political atmosphere changed and intermarriage was no longer encouraged by the Hudson’s Bay Company. Slowly, communities of people of mixed-heritage began to form in the Great Lakes region; in what is now Ontario. These mixed (or Métis) communities developed a way of life that was distinct from their Aboriginal and European ancestors, in terms of food, dress, customs, and eventually even language.

The presence of Métis people in the Mackenzie drainage is intrinsically linked to the fur trade (Bellman & Hanks, 1998; Devine, 1998). The earliest accounts of the presence of Métis people in the Great Slave Lake region date back to François Beaulieu I<sup>7</sup>, as early as 1750 (Abel, 1993; Devine, 1998; Jones, 2005). Prior to the arrival of traders, historians estimate that a few mixed-heritage families resided in the Great Slave Lake area. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a growing number of mixed-heritage Métis children had been born in the area.

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<sup>7</sup> François Beaulieu I, also known as “The Patriarch” is a well-known Northern Métis person. He, and his sons, guided and translated on many expeditions. The Beaulieu name is still common in the North Slave region, and name landmarks in the North Slave region bear this name (i.e. Beaulieu Bay, Beaulieu River).



Similar to Métis in the Great Lakes region, the first Métis people in the north did not consider themselves as a distinct group, despite coming from mixed-heritage backgrounds (Devine, 1998). Northern Métis people did begin to understand themselves as ethnically distinct from the wider social landscape of the North, and northern Métis identity began to form on the basis of ancestry, language, a sense of place, religion, and social & economic roles that was different from the Dene and the other traders present in the region (Bellman & Hanks, 1998).

Devine (1998) argues that the emergence of this northern Métis identity pre-dated, or accompanied, that of the Red River Métis, who lived near the present day location of Winnipeg. In the 1800s, during the early days of Northern Métis beginnings, Métis people considered the land around the Mackenzie basin their homeland, and were free to travel, hunt, trap and live off of the land (Devine, 1998). There was an accepted fluidity of identity in terms of family ties, and many Métis people had close family ties and social links with the Dene people they lived with and near. These Métis of Dene descent who were born in the area that is now NWT

“had a sense of attachment to the land and the people of the Mackenzie River Basin that was qualitatively different than that of Red River Métis who moved north with the fur trade. Dene-Métis had a very specific sense of place, tied to their Aboriginal connection with the original people of the region. Their knowledge of the land resulted from their enduring bonds with their Dene relatives.” (Bellman & Hanks, 1998, p 30)

Figure 1 below shows the communities in the Mackenzie drainage that Métis people lived in, and still live in to this day.



Figure 1: Métis Communities in the Northern Mackenzie Basin (*Métis Heritage Association of the Northwest Territories, 1998, p. 4*)

### 2.1.2 Northern Métis and treaties, scrip, & land claims

In 1899, Treaty No. 8 was signed between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal people who were living south of Great Slave Lake. At this time, a parallel “Half-Breed Scrip Commission” issued “scrip” – payment of cash or land – to Métis people (Fumoleau, 1973). In 1921, the federal government ventured further into the north with Treaty No. 11 (See Figure 2 below), hoping that many Métis “who were living the Indian way of life” – as many northern Métis were – would take treaty as opposed to being issued scrip (McCormack, 1998). In taking treaty, many Métis people feared losing their right to vote, drink alcohol, and own private

property, and worried about being confined to reserves. Subsequently, many more northern Métis chose scrip than the federal government expected.



Figure 2: The lands covered by Treaty 8 and Treaty 11 (Fumoleau, 1973, p. 315)

The consequences of treaty and scrip are still felt. The collective Aboriginal population of the North (including Métis people) became instantly divided between those who had a special legal status as “Indian” (this includes both Dene people and Métis who signed treaty papers), and those who lacked any legal recognition (this included “Half-Breeds,” i.e. Métis, and some “non-status Indians,” Dene people who did not sign the treaty papers). Suddenly, people who were once in the same social and economic communities, and had equal access to the land and its resources for harvesting and hunting, found themselves divided with differential access to the resources. For a time, Métis people who were issued scrip had no more rights to the land than

other Canadians (McCormack, 1998). A greater conceptual barrier between the Dene and Métis populations was further developed in the discourse using the terms “treaty Indians” and “those who took scrip”. Note that this latter group are *not* referred to using the term Métis in any way. This further reflects the underlying ambiguity of Métis identity (McCormack, 1998). Technically, “treaty Indians” also include a population of Métis people too. This group of Métis people was then legally referred to as “Indians.” Conversely, “those who took scrip,” which included for the most part Métis people, were not legally referred to as anything in particular, which left the term “those who took scrip”, but, crucially, Métis people are again not referred to as Métis (the Dene who took scrip are also stripped of their collective group name<sup>8</sup>).

Once treaties and scrip were settled, the doors were opened to a stream of industry, chiefly those interested in resource extraction. This affected both groups, though Dene groups had official legal status, which ensured continued access to the land. It was evident that there were misunderstandings between the parties regarding the intentions of the federal government in taking treaty or scrip, and the implications for traditional land use were not adequately explained to the populations indigenous to the region (Fumoleau, 1973; McCormack, 1998; North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999).

Ironically, after dividing the two Aboriginal populations in the north during the early 1900s, and grouping the Métis population with other long term non-Aboriginal residents, the federal government decided that in negotiating land claims, the two Aboriginal groups Indigenous to the area (Métis and Dene) must be grouped together. Though the federal

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<sup>8</sup> Note that calling all the diverse First Nations across Canada who signed a Treaty “Treaty Indians” is also stripping aboriginal groups of their names. This allowed non-Aboriginal Canadians to refer to the incredibly diverse First Nations as one “Indian” group (“Treaty Indians”).

government agreed to receive two land claims, they stated that there can only be one settlement, and that “the Indian and Métis live together in the same communities and must see themselves as ‘one’ people” (Penner, 1978, in McCormack, 1998, p. 199). The joint Dene-Métis land claim fell apart in 1990, and subsequently many land claims are currently being negotiated between the five aboriginal groups who were part of the joint land claim and the federal government.

The repercussions of taking treaty or scrip have had a long lasting impact on Métis people in the north. Administratively, it divided the Aboriginal population of the north and subsequently has implications for traditional land use and land claim negotiations. A real life example of the implications of taking treaty or scrip is that some Métis families became divided between family members who took treaty, and those who were issued scrip. In addition, Métis continue to be treated differently from their Dene relatives by the territorial and federal governments (McCormack, 1998).

### 2.1.3 The birth of the North Slave Métis Alliance

The North Slave Métis Alliance (NSMA) was born in the political aftermath of the collapse of the joint Dene- Métis land claim, discussed above in §2.1.2. The NSMA was formed in 1996 to represent the Aboriginal rights-bearing Métis people of the northern Great Slave Lake area. The NSMA mandate includes the assertion, protection, and implementation of the Aboriginal rights of the North Slave Métis people and the exercise of Métis responsibility to protect the environment and to promote and enhance Métis education, economic, social, and cultural development (North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999). Additionally, the NSMA is working toward negotiate, ratify and implement a comprehensive self-government agreement with federal and territorial governments based on the principles of the inherent right to self-govern (North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999).

NSMA members are direct descendants of Indigenous Métis who used and occupied the lands in the North Slave region prior to 1921. Federal law ensures that NSMA membership is mutually exclusive from membership in another Aboriginal group (North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999). It is those who self-identify as Métis who choose to be members of the North Slave Métis Alliance. There are currently approximately 400 North Slave Métis Alliance members.

## **2.2 The historic languages of Métis north of 60°**

The situation of Métis languages in the Northwest Territories is complicated. In the NWT there are 11 official languages, 9 of which are Aboriginal languages. Northern Métis were historically fluent in many languages, and some of these languages, such as Cree, Chipewyan, and Tłıchǫ, are officially recognized, and still spoken by some Métis people, but, through journalled accounts of early white European exporters and priests, historians concluded that it was “Michif” that Métis considered to be their mother tongue (McCarthy, 1998; Payment, 1998; Irlbacher-Fox & Fort Providence Métis Council, 2007).

Many academic and historic sources refer to *Michif* in the north, but we must ask ourselves what does Michif mean in the context of the north; does it refer to Métis people, as in Métis people spoke *michif* – a broad term for all the diverse languages Métis people speak (as described in §1.4 *Challenges*), or does it refer to the Michif language – a mixed Cree-French language spoken by a group of Métis people, predominantly those with roots in the Red River regions, near the present day Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada?

The mixed Cree-French language, Michif, is a language that came about sometime in the era of the fur trade spoken by the descendants of European men and Aboriginal women (Bakker, 1997). Its roots lie *in a place* in southern Canada where Métis communities were first forming,

and *in a space* where a Métis identity was emerging<sup>9</sup>. Bakker (1997) shows that there is linguistic variation<sup>10</sup> recurring in several Métis communities which would be incredibly unlikely to have arisen independently in each community, and therefore, this variation comes from a common place. This suggests that the language had to be crystallized before the dispersal of Métis people from the Red River settlement, near the present day Winnipeg, thus making it a separate language at least before 1860, and probably before the 1840s (Bakker, 1997, p. 159-161).

Keeping in mind Bakker's time frame for the crystalization of Michif, McCarthy (1998) asserts that François Beaulieu II<sup>11</sup>, who was born in 1793 in the Great Slave Lake region, spoke "Michif." If Beaulieu was speaking "Michif," this would suggest that the language had crystallized at a very minimum, 40 years earlier than Bakker's date of 1840. Emile Petitot, an Oblate missionary, further documented northern Métis people speaking "Michif" during his stay in the north between 1862 and 1874 (Savoie, 1977). While these timelines nearly align, we must also take into consideration the difference between "big M" Michif and "small m" michif<sup>12</sup>, and the importance of nomenclature, where "big M" Michif refers to the mixed Cree-French language, and "small m" michif is used ambiguously to denote the language used by Métis people, regardless of its relation to Michif, the Cree-French language.

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter Bakker's (1997) Chapter 7: Ethnogenesis and Language Genesis for a more detailed look at the beginnings of Métis culture and Michif in a broader context.

<sup>10</sup> Bakker (1997): "...in all the communities there are people who use *sa* as a locative preposition with certain preposition phrases instead of *da*" (p. 159). It would be unlikely that across communities, a common variation would occur, unless the sources of the variation came from the same place.

<sup>11</sup> François Beaulieu II, son of "the Patriarch" is a prominent Métis person from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>12</sup> This relates to the discourse around "big M" Métis, and "small m" métis to differentiate those who share a historical and cultural heritage that dates back to the fur trade ("big M" Métis), and those who may self-identify as métis, as they are of mixed ancestry, but do not share a cultural heritage with Métis people ("small m" métis).

Petitot (1981) also recounts a story told to him in 1863 by François Beaulieu II where Beaulieu describes the arrival of a great number of French explorers who were looking for anyone who understood French. They asked his uncle, Jacques, if anyone here spoke French, who answered “*Sans nul doute! Nous sommes tous ici Français ou fils de Français*” (Savoie, 1977; Bellman & Hanks, 1998; Jones, 2005). Payment (1998) explains that “until the 1940s, Métis students learned [in mission schools] “the French of the nuns, ... which was very likely also the language of their forefathers,” though she does not state why or from whom she knows this. Devine (1998) recounts the story of Elder Morris Lafferty<sup>13</sup> who, in his description of his first Métis oral history lesson from his grandmother, states, “And I quote in English, for she spoke French...” There are lists of French nouns used in Slavey documented by Father Posset which are said to be contributed by Métis, and “Michif French and “convent French” are spoken by elders in Fort Simpson and [Fort] Resolution” (Payment, 1998, p. 105). These historical sources can be contrasted with the ones above; they suggest that the language being spoken was French. Interestingly, as you can see from the passages presented, Petitot, who was French, referred to the language of the Métis north of 60° as both Michif and French.

Michif has also been discussed more contemporarily. In the early 1990s a conference on Métis languages in the north was organized and attended by linguist Betty Harnum and Michif speakers. The proceedings of the conference were never published. The recordings and transcripts are at the archives in the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, and while they exist, at the time of the research, it was not possible to access them publicly. I was able to look over the transcripts with special permission, and was able to establish that at the time of the

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<sup>13</sup> Lafferty is another large, wide-spread Métis family name in the Mackenzie basin.



conference the informal consensus from linguists, and speakers at the meeting, was that the language spoken by Northern Métis was a variety of French, and distinctly different from the mixed Cree-French language, Michif. The transcripts that I was given access to had all been translated into English, and so it was impossible to ascertain from them what the structure of the language was.

The aforementioned Métis language conference was discussed on page 35 of the 1993/1994 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner of the NWT. It was recommended:

“That the GNWT support the research, documentation and analysis of the Michif language in the NWT, to permit thorough consideration of this language in the context of Official Languages.”  
(Government of the Northwest Territories, 1994)

This recommendation follows from both the findings of the conference proceedings, and the results of the Métis National census project that confirmed the existence of Michif in the NWT<sup>14</sup>.

The Annual Report went on to state:

A refusal to recognize Michif as a language and afford the proper resources to permit thorough documentation, research and analysis contributes to the devaluation of Métis culture and heritage.  
(Government of the Northwest Territories, 1994, p. 35)

Ten years later, in 2003, a Special Committee was established to review the NWT Languages Act (Special Committee on the Review of the Official Languages Act, 2003). In this report, there is a brief section on Michif; at that time Betty Harnum was commissioned to research Métis languages in the NWT. It was determined that the more common form of the language in the NWT was Michif French, though some speakers in the southeastern regions of the NWT may speak Michif (Special Committee on the Review of the Official Languages Act,

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<sup>14</sup> Note the conflicting findings within the one year: at the conference, the informal consensus was that the language was not Michif, and the findings of the Métis Nation were that Michif exists in the NWT.

2002). The recommendation was made by the Special Committee that: “Michif research be funded with the intent of determining an appropriate designation for this language.” (Note the similarities to the 1994 recommendation, and the continued nomenclature: Michif). The response of the GNWT was as follows:

“The GNWT agrees that Michif should be researched to determine an appropriate designation for the language. Métis people in the Northwest Territories are recognized as Aboriginal people, as evidenced in various GNWT programs (for example, Student Financial Assistance and Métis Health Benefits). There is still a lack of understanding of Métis languages in the Northwest Territories.” (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2003)

The commitment of action by the GNWT was that:

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment will conduct this research on Michif Language through Aboriginal Language Initiative funding. The focus of the research will be to determine the number of Michif speakers in the NWT before decisions are made regarding the designation of the language. (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2003)

There is no evidence of this research being completed, nor is there information on the number of Michif speakers in the NWT<sup>15</sup>.

Regardless of what the language has historically been referred to as, or its lack of official status within the Northwest Territories, and the circular recommendations, the fact is that English is increasingly being used by North Slave Métis Alliance members (Bill Enge, personal communication, October 2012). Over a decade after the Special Committee’s recommendation, there have been no results, and the language of Northern Métis is still the only language of an cultural group of people Indigenous to the Northwest Territories that has not been granted official status. This has put the language that is Indigenous to Métis people at a disadvantage compared to other Aboriginal languages in the territory in terms of capacity and funding that is required to undertake language revitalization efforts. While the NSMA has been interested in

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<sup>15</sup> Also, there was no justification regarding why “determining the number of speakers” was arbitrarily chosen to be the goal of the research, or why determining numbers of speakers was necessary for decisions to be made.

pursuing language revitalization efforts, they have been focused on fighting for the basic rights of their people that are needed for survival, chiefly, hunting rights and a land base (Bill Enge, personal communication, October 2012).

## 2.3 North Slave Métis voices

There is no doubt that language shift is taking place among the North Slave Métis community. In this section, I provide a more contemporary context by highlighting the voices of NSMA members documented in their publication *Can't Live Without Work* (NSMA, 1999). Hinton (2001a) states that “the loss of Indigenous languages is tied closely to *i*) the usurpation of Indigenous lands, *ii*) the destruction of Indigenous habitats, and *iii*) the involuntary incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the larger society (generally into the lower-class margins of that society)” (p. 4; roman numerals and emphasis mine). Let’s look at each of these points in relation to the North Slave Métis community and the social research they have already done.

### 2.3.1 The usurpation of Indigenous lands

*“The discovery of oil at Norman wells in 1920 served as the catalyst for Canada’s renewed interest in dispossessing Dene and Métis of the Mackenzie basin their rights to lands and resources.”*

*(North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 47)*

In 1920, after the discovery of oil, Treaty No. 11 was brought north. As I mentioned in §2.1.2 *Northern Métis and treaties, scrip, & land claims*, entering into treaty required Métis people to forfeit much of their way of life, and, consequently, many chose not to take treaty. The only other option for Métis people was to be issued scrip. The goal of forcing Métis people to either

take treaty or scrip was to make the Métis disappear legislatively (North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999). Clem Paul, past president of the North Slave Métis Alliance describes the situation as follows:

My dad was a Métis from Alberta, he wasn't allowed to trap or hunt here in those days years ago. My mother was a treaty Indian, you would say, according to the Indian Act she was a Métis, but she lost her status because she married my father, so she wasn't allowed to do that either. Our use of the land was cut off. (North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 49)

After losing access to the land (by being issued scrip), many North Slave Métis settled in an area known as “the flats” in Yellowknife. Eventually, the municipal government wanted to sell this land for a high price; they again forced Métis people to move. Many refused. This didn't stop the municipal government. The city moved the municipal garbage dump adjacent to the Métis homes where:

... they burnt sewage, cars, gas cans, everything. ... The options were to stay near the dump and die, or move to low-cost housing. It was a scam. The government then bought up the land, surveyed parcels and when non-natives started moving in, they moved the dump. ... That's what they did to Métis all over. ... The city would try to get the families to move any way they could, then bulldoze their homes, survey it, and then offer it for sale. That is how Yellowknife was built. That is what they are proud of. (Clem Paul, North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 62).

With the discovery of resources in the north, Canada was quick to ensure that the vast land on which many Dene and Métis people lived would be handed over to the state. When the land in the Yellowknife area on which Métis people settled after relocation was seen to be of value, we see that Métis people were once again pressured to move. From the land that they traditionally used, to the land they relocated to, external pressures were put on Métis families forcing them to relocate. Métis people have indeed been dispossessed from their traditional lands.

### 2.3.2 The destruction of Indigenous habitats

Oil at Norman Wells was only the beginning of a new trend of resource extraction in the North. Gold, diamonds, and rare earth metals are being extracted from the lands of the North Slave Métis homeland at an astonishingly high rate. Currently, the federal government is working

toward making the Environmental Assessment procedure easier for mining companies (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 2010). This is not supported by Aboriginal groups (or those concerned for the well-being of the land) (Northern News Services, 2013). Consultation processes must take place with all Aboriginal groups (including the North Slave Métis Alliance) before development takes place (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 2012). Nevertheless, many of the mining companies go in with the attitude that the mining operation will proceed, regardless of the result of the Environmental Assessment and Aboriginal consultation process.

North Slave Métis Alliance members have expressed their concerns about the destruction of Indigenous habitats in mining operations:

I know in the past, in other mines, the tailings ponds and whatnot as a result of different types of mining activity has polluted our environment. ... we have a lot of polluted sites in this area from past mining activity. Gold mining was bad because of all the chemicals they used, such as mercury and cyanide and the by-products of arsenic. ... [Diamond mines are] a lot different, but what they don't use in hazardous material, they make up in their size and the impact on the land, and the destruction of habitat and the large amount of activity. (Bob Turner, North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 99)

They started mining in [a lake up the East Arm of Great Slave Lake] and they just mined the hell out of it. It's still dead. That was in the thirties, I think. The mine opened up maybe for a year. I'm not sure how long. They didn't even get a gold brick out of it. That's how bad they polluted that one lake... It's very hard to heal. Sixty years and it's still not healed. [Speaking now of potential future mining...] If that happens up there, and it spreads to other lakes, there's rivers... All the lakes are interconnected. From there, it will seep into other lakes. It will be polluted all the way around. (Lawrence Lafferty, North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 98)

Métis people also worry about the impacts of mining operations on the animals, caribou, fish, and other carnivores. While mining does bring some economic stimulus to the territory, it is not without costs. The land and water systems that North Slave Métis Alliance members and their descendants have used for generations are being degraded because of mining operations (North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999). This exemplifies the destruction of Indigenous habitats in relation to resource extraction.

### 2.3.3 The involuntary incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the larger society (generally into the lower-class margins of that society)

While the usurpation of Indigenous lands and destruction of Indigenous habitats speaks to European control and power of the land and resources, the incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the larger society speaks to the assimilation that results from these power dynamics<sup>16</sup>. One's interpretation of events depends on one's philosophies and the interplay between structural determinism and free will. Do people's situations reflect societal structures which inhibit or encourage them to be there, or, are people free agents and where they find themselves can be traced back to their effort and agency. I would argue that there is a bit of both.

Mining companies and the territorial government emphasize the positive economic benefits, such as increased GDP, over the potential negative environmental, social, cultural, and economic risks mining can have on the communities involved (Bell, 2013; Irlbacher-Fox & Mills, 2007; Hall, 2012). Impact Benefit Agreements<sup>17</sup> (IBAs), and Socio-Economic Agreements<sup>18</sup> between companies, the GNWT, Aboriginal groups are meant to ensure that a certain amount of positions in the mining industry are filled by people Indigenous to the NWT. The prevailing sentiment, though, is that there has been a tendency for Indigenous people to be hired for unskilled, low-paying positions. They get the "shovel".

I understand that there's probably a lot employed at the existing mine [BHP] right now, but what I would like to see is the opportunity for [Métis] to get more of the high-end jobs. ... Just don't have everybody on the end of a shovel, and doing the maid work... Do not just give them the low end [jobs]. Eventually, they're going to quit, and then [Diavik] is going to say, 'those damned Aboriginals

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<sup>16</sup> I will speak more about Power in Chapter 3: Methodology.

<sup>17</sup> IBAs are signed between two parties: Corporations and unique Aboriginal Authorities (i.e. DeBeers Gachoo Kue Mine and NSMA). The contents of IBAs are confidential. (See also: [http://www.impactandbenefit.com/IBA\\_Database\\_List/](http://www.impactandbenefit.com/IBA_Database_List/))

<sup>18</sup> SEAs are signed between Corporations and Governments. Some SEAs, such as Diavik Diamond Mines Inc. (DDMI) SEA, include three parties: DDMI, GNWT, and "Aboriginal signatories and Parties". The contents of SEAs are publicly available. (See also: <http://www.iti.gov.nt.ca/programs-services/socio-economic-agreements>)

are not good. All they want to do is work for a few times, get enough money to do what they have to do.’ (Jack Balsillie, North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 217)

When my Dad got to Yellowknife, he got a job at Giant Mine, and back then the most you could hope for was to be a labourer if you were Native... there wasn’t much future for natives, whether you be a Métis or a pure native... (Fred LeMouel, North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 215)

... a lot of the positions that they [BHP] are filling Aboriginal people with or northerners are all low entry-level positions... (Dianna Beck, North Slave Métis Alliance, 1999, p. 217)

The low-paying jobs that are offered to Métis people at the mines are one example of the involuntary incorporation of Indigenous peoples into “lower-class margins of the larger society”.

While the North Slave Métis Alliance, like other aboriginal groups, has SEAs with mines in the region, the information that the mining companies tracks concerning the employment and professional development of members from specific aboriginal groups is nebulous. Each year the GNWT produces an annual report titled *Communities and Diamonds* which reviews a variety of socio-economic indicators to determine the effects of the mine on communities in the Northwest Territories (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2014). The communities reported on are Yellowknife and seven small local communities; Behchokò, Detah, Gamètì, Łutselk’e, N’Dilo, Wekweètì, and Whatì. Therefore, NSMA members who live in Yellowknife are included as part of Yellowknife. As an example, note the graph charting average income of mine workers.

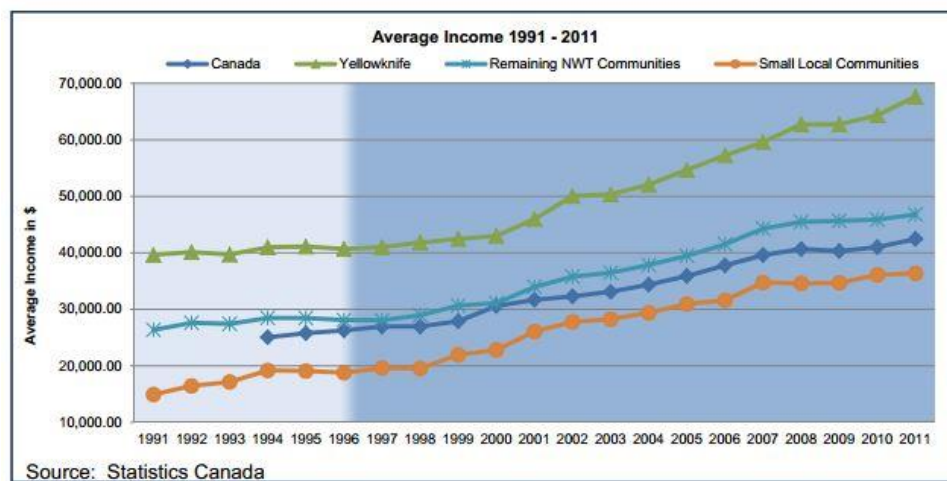


Figure 3: GNWT reporting average income in the *Community and Diamonds* report. (GNWT, 2014, p.29)

From Figure 3, it can be seen that people from Yellowknife have a higher average income than those in Small Local Communities. This reporting, however, tells us nothing about the average income of Métis people.

Nevertheless, North Slave Métis people have reached high levels of perceived success from a euro-centric standpoint. Many members of the NSMA contribute to the economic growth of the NWT – for example, many have good jobs, have university degrees, or are business owners. In government work and politics, Northern Métis have also excelled. Many Métis hold, or have held, high positions in the government.

These structures within which Métis are working are based on euro-centric, western philosophies of economic development and governance, brought to the North by the settler community. At play, we can see both the structural determinist view that there are structures put in place which affect people's lives. On the other hand, agency also comes into play, where people do create the life they want for themselves.

## **2.4 Summary of Context and Rationale**

Chapter 2: *Context and Rationale*, I explored the historical, geographical, political, and linguistic context within which the project is taking place. I began by introducing Northern Métis, including a discussion on Treaty and Scrip, and the birth of the NSMA. I touched on some historical references to the languages of Northern Métis people, and concluded by providing a more contemporary insight into today's reality through voices heard in past NSMA publication *Can't Live Without Work* (NSMA, 1999).

Throughout the entirety of Chapter 2: *Context and Rationale*, it is evident that the three factors Hinton suggests contribute to language shift have been historically present in the North



Slave Métis community, and in some parts of the community, continue to be present.

Community members have experienced dispossession of lands, destruction of their lands, and involuntary incorporation into the larger society. The context set in this chapter has demonstrated how language loss can be linked to other issues facing NSMA members. Today, the NSMA is working hard to mitigate and reverse negative effects colonial rule has had on many realms of their community.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

In Chapter 3: *Methodology and Methods*, I look at the theoretical approaches that underlie Language Revitalization (LR) work. LR has been referred to as a *movement* and efforts aim to both slow down, stop, or reverse the decline of a language, as well as educate, empower, or mobilize Indigenous communities (Hermes, Bang, & Marin, 2012). The range of LR efforts are incredibly broad, and in the case of this thesis, I am conducting a Language Survey as a LR tool. Many Language Revitalization efforts are grounded in Feminist and Native American methodologies. In §3.1 *Epistemology and Methodologies*, to follow, I discuss these methodologies in more detail. I then go on to discuss work done by other scholars who are engaged in LR research in §3.2 *Academia and language revitalization efforts*. In this section, you will see how the methodologies discussed in §3.1 *Epistemology and Methodologies* are applied to the field of Métis language research. Next in §3.3 *The academic study of Métis languages*, I lay out the research other academics have done on Métis languages. Finally in § 3.4 *North Slave Métis Language Survey Methods*, I present the methods I used in the North Slave Métis Language Survey.

### 3.1 Epistemology and Methodologies

My epistemology is informed by post-colonial theories (Weenie, 2000; Barnett, 2006); participatory (Truong & Garcez, 2012), participatory-action (Kidd & Kral, 2005), and action (Ladkin, 2004) research; Native American methods (Hermes, 1998; Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996; Wilson, 2003; Wilson, 2004; Wilson, 2008; Thompson, 2008; Kovach, 2006); and feminist (England, 2006) methodologies. Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) discusses these theoretical

approaches in relationship to collaboration in linguistics. I am particularly influenced by her Community-Based Linguistic Research framework, which put these theories in the context of endangered language research methodologies and collaborations with endangered language communities.

The loss of a language cannot be separated from social, political, and economic factors (Bobaljik, 1998; Hinton, 2001a). It is evident from the current state of affairs in Canada that the cultural hegemony within which we live favors non-Aboriginal social, political, and economic structures to Indigenous ways of knowing<sup>19</sup>. Power is accessed when certain cultural forms are made to prevail over others (Weenie, 2000). Subsequently, a power relationship exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous structures.

Weenie (2000) states “naming and defining the problem is the first step toward post-colonial recovering and healing” (p. 65). In the field of anthropology, the concept of power and its reallocation have been central to research projects, but in linguistics, power is not made a central theme and it is often the linguist who determines the goals, processes and outcomes of the research (Shulist, 2013). Even when linguistic fieldwork is done sensitively and with reflection, there are often asymmetries that exist between *researcher* and *researched* (Rice, 2011; Dobrin, 2008). In collaborations where the community and linguist do establish the goals, processes, and outcomes collaboratively as equal partners, there is still a divide such that speakers are considered experts of the language, while the linguist is considered the metalinguistic expert (Shulist, 2013). This is reconciled when speakers are trained academically in linguistics in a

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<sup>19</sup> For one example, look to the “Idle No More” movement of 2012/2013, and note the federal government’s response, the movement’s representation in media (from Canadian sources as disparate as the CBC to SUN News Network to the Globe and Mail and National Post) as well as comments made by the public within these forums to gain some perspective.

Western/“white”/academic environment, but Shulist argues that this is not truly co-theorization, where the validity of the native nonanthropologists’ [or nonlinguists’] worldviews and ways of thinking is recognized. Furthermore, Shulist argues that speakers are further removed from the project due to the elusive manner in which linguists discuss language. Shulist believes that collaborative linguistic fieldwork presents “a reductive, closed view of goals and interests [and] may also allow powerful voices to mediate community driven goals” (p. 10).

In my understanding, the true removal of power dynamics is impossible. But, in being sensitive to power relations that exist and drawing upon reflexivity to better understand my role as a linguist, the research aims to work outside of the preconceived barriers of power structures toward decolonization.

### 3.1.1 Participatory, participatory-action, action, and interaction frameworks

Participatory, participatory-action, action, and interaction frameworks are collaborative approaches which value the knowledge of community members in the research process. If engaged with effectively, these methodologies will lessen the gap between researcher and participant. In these frameworks, the mindset and approach to research is important to the development of the project, and the process itself is as important as the result (Kidd & Kral, 2005; Ladkin, 2004). The community should feel empowered by the research (Truong & Garcez, 2012), and the results of the research should have a practical outcome that is useful to people in their everyday life (Ladkin, 2004). To address the criticism that action research downplays the importance of building theory from experience, interactive research attempts to develop theory, while being practically relevant (Sandberg & Wallo, 2013). These orientations toward research embrace multiple ways of understanding a situation, and oppose the idea that one path would lead to a better outcome (Ladkin, 2004). In adopting a mindset between participatory and

interaction, you are acknowledging the validity of many ways of knowing and working toward decolonization.

### 3.1.2 Feminist and Native American methodologies

Feminist and Native American methodologies converge with those mentioned above in holding to the philosophy that research priorities can, and should, address the needs of the community. In this way, the research steers away from being exploitive, and the research process becomes reciprocal (Hermes, 2007). Similarly, it was my goal for this project to be collaborative, and reciprocal. I tried to address the needs of the community, and produce outcomes that will have a practical application to North Slave Métis community members.

### 3.1.3 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (Dey, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1997) will inform my analysis of the results. In grounded theory, themes are discovered in the result. Taken to the extreme, a grounded theorist would not review the literature prior to fieldwork, under the belief that the researcher must act as a *tabula rasa* and withhold biases that may occur in reviewing the literature (Mills, Donner, & Francis, 2006). I took the approach that it is necessary to review the literature to some extent in order to interweave the literature throughout the process of my fieldwork (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Dey (2004) likens the process of theory emerging from categorization of data to a picture slowly emerging from a patchwork mosaic; you cannot predict the final result until it has been completed. Similarly, categories and themes that are important to the community will emerge through consultation and collaboration with community members over the period of the fieldwork.

### 3.1.4 Reflections on Methodologies

While the goal of this thesis is to find out the language practices and attitudes of the North Slave Métis community through a language survey, it is equally important that the research is done in a respectful manner. I know I am white, educated, linguistically trained, female, and an outsider to the community with which I am working, and because of who I am, and where I come from, I bring with me the history of other white, educated, linguistically trained female researchers. Research has not always been respectful of Indigenous knowledge, and ways of knowing. By looking at research through the lenses of the methodologies discussed above, I have attempted to not add to power imbalances between myself and the North Slave Métis community. These methodologies place the importance on the community and focus on respectful relationships.

## 3.2 Academia and language revitalization efforts

This section looks at the academic context of language revitalization efforts. One objective of this work is to thematically document the voices of community members by conducting a language survey. Language surveys are a tool that have been used in sociolinguistics, and are often the first step in language revitalization efforts (Hinton, 2001b). Broadly, language surveys aim to uncover the linguistic and sociolinguistic realities of a community (Blair, 1990). Surveys can also be used to identify priorities to create good strategy regarding language revitalization efforts (Nahhas, 2007). Language revitalization efforts range across a wide variety of activities, and while grassroots community-based language revitalization efforts have been taking place in Indigenous communities across the world since elders and community members first noticed language shift occurring, the academic field of language revitalization is a relatively new field of

study. Language revitalization efforts attempt to address real-world issues by applying linguistic practices.

To begin, in §3.2.1 *Community-Based Language Research and Collaborative methods*, I present a small literature review on linguistic research, and present Community-Based Language Research (CBLR) methods (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009). The literature that I have reviewed, and specifically the thoughts behind CLBR, were driving forces in the development of the North Slave Métis language survey, which is the focus of this thesis. Two much discussed aspects of CBLR are collaboration and relationships, and in following sections I take a closer look into the role of collaboration (§3.2.2 *Notes and thoughts on collaborative frameworks*) and relationships (§3.2.3 *In which we move from Collaborations to Relations*) in research. I provided this academic context, as I drew upon these themes in designing the North Slave Métis language survey.

### 3.2.1 Community-Based Language Research and Collaborative methods

Increasingly, there has been a call for linguistic fieldwork, especially in the realm of language revitalization research, to be based in ethical, community-based, collaborative methods (Bobaljik, 1998; Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Dwyer, 2006, 2010; Rice, 2006, 2011; Yamada, 2007; Guérin & Lacrampe, 2010; Leonard & Haynes, 2010; Grimes, 2011). This has evolved from earlier practices in linguistic research, where some linguists viewed speakers as a source from which they could extract data (Samarin, 1967, in Rice, 2006). Thompson (2008) uses the idea of a continuum to distinguish western paradigms and Indigenous paradigms, with respect to research being done for, with and by Indigenous people. She points out that people carry out research on all points of the continuum.

Depending on the researcher's epistemology and goals, and the context of the study, linguistic research can be done along a continuum; at one end, speaker's knowledge and voice is considered the source of data, and the other end involves more collaborative methods. In some contexts, it is acceptable for researchers to conduct parachute research; whereby they arrive, collect their data, and leave the community, all within a short time frame<sup>20</sup> (Vaux & Cooper, 1999, in Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Dwyer, 2010; Guérin & Lacrampe, 2010; Crippen & Robinson, 2013). There is a call, though, for this type of research to be avoided when working with endangered language communities on language revitalization efforts, and instead to be replaced by collaborative methods (Dwyer, 2010).

Not only is it a trend in linguistic research, but research best-practice guidelines, such as the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institute of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1998), *Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North* (Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, 2003), and *Doing Research in the Northwest Territories: A guide for Researchers Applying for a Scientific Research Licence* (The Aurora Research Institute, 1996), all stress the importance of involving local (Northern) residents in research projects, and building partnerships founded on mutual understanding and trust. In addition, from a personal perspective, my personality, and own personal values align with this style of research. It is, therefore, in a collaborative framework from which I attempt to do this research.

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<sup>20</sup> This is not meant to be negative. All research needs to be approved by Ethic Boards, and the style of research must be justified by the researcher. All research deemed to be unsuitable will be stopped by the ethics board and need to be re-designed.



In Czaykowska-Higgins' (2009) work, she outlined the Community-Based Language Research framework where research “on a language is conducted for, with, and by the language-speaking community” (p. 24). This type of research requires high levels of engagement with the community. Czaykowska-Higgins presents some challenges of Community-Based Language Research, including establishing relationships, determining roles, institutional issues, and establishing research questions. She points out that the process itself is often the result of the project and notes that there will never be one “right” way to conduct linguistic research, as one needs to take into account the context of the research.

Bobaljik (1998) asserts that language shift is not about “languages”; rather, he argues it is a social, political, and economic phenomenon<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the “traditional” expertise of a linguist (for example, compiling grammars or dictionaries) does not address the root causes of language loss. He asks us to remember the *visions* and *realities* mentioned in the title of his chapter, *Visions and realities: Researcher-Activist-Indigenous collaborations in Indigenous language maintenance*. The *vision*, he maintains, “is one of a more just and equal society” (p. 23), while the *reality* is that “such a change will be long in coming” (p. 23). He suggests that to achieve the vision, and have successful language programs in reality, there needs to be collaboration and coordination among researchers and Indigenous activists.

Similarly, Henderson, Rohloff and Henderson (2014) agree that the primary causes of language shift are not linguistic or socio-linguistic, and they contend, like Bobaljik and Czaykowska-Higgins, that the causes are social, political, and economic factors. They go as far as offering a new model for language revitalization that does not focus on language learning, and

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<sup>21</sup> Refer back to Chapter 2 for evidence that language shift in the North Slave Métis community is a social, political, and economic phenomenon.

language use, but rather on addressing the root causes of language shift. Therefore, Henderson, Rohloff and Henderson suggest collaboration with social development organizations is necessary for language revitalization efforts. In this vein, development activities are vehicles for Indigenous language use and promotion. This requires collaboration and partnership between linguists and development agencies.

### 3.2.2 Notes and thoughts on collaborative frameworks

In contemplating myriad models of linguistic fieldwork, I began to better understand the diversity of models of scientific research. I saw that because of the physical context in which I was conducting the research (see §2.1), the academic context of language revitalization efforts, and my own epistemologies, it would be necessary to work collaboratively.

In laying the groundwork of designing the survey, Dwyer's (2010) *Models of Successful Collaboration* resonated with me, and I continually thought of the four general principles of collaboration that Dwyer outlined: 1) Assessing needs of all players, 2) Clarity in goals, methodologies, communications, and payments, 3) Flexibility, and 4) Empowerment. While working collaboratively often implies being a member of a multi-disciplinary team, Dwyer (2010) notes:

If done ethically and in consultation with local communities, small-group work, with a sole linguist and a few language consultants, is an acceptable alternative. Such work is common because it allows projects to be smaller and more topically focused. (p. 279)

I began to see how working with the NSMA community on a language revitalization project could be both small and collaborative. The North Slave Métis Language survey is exploratory in nature, as no research has yet been done on Michif in the Northwest Territories. In the future with the knowledge gained from this study, there is a potential for the community to

decide how it wants to proceed with its language goals and decide if a larger multi-disciplinary team is something they want and need in their language revitalization efforts.

Leonard & Haynes (2010) offer a model of truly collaborative fieldwork, where the researcher and community's needs, as well as the researcher and community's expertise, all have equal access to the project. Trust is also built between the two parties over time. They propose:

...a multi-directional empowerment in which the shared beliefs in the value and design of the research project empower all parties to articulate their needs and fully incorporate their expertise in light of the various possible ways in which the final goals could be achieved. In this sense, the shared vision in the value and possibilities associated with the project itself, along with a shared commitment to realizing its potential, is the source of the empowerment. (Leonard & Haynes, 2010, p. 287)

They illustrate this model in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4: Leonard & Haynes (2010) Model of Truly Collaborative Fieldwork (p. 288)

Leonard and Haynes note that this model focuses on the input to the research: in this model the nature of the outputs is not predetermined, and will therefore be decided collectively.

Through this model, the authors offer this vision of the end result:

...the model imposes no predetermined design to the goals and outcomes of the research. Instead, we call for a research paradigm in which **the community expresses its expectations** while the **researcher conducts work within parameters that are realistic to the situation**. Though there will likely be compromises in the crafting of the project, the end result is that it is everybody's project—not the researcher's project or the community's project, but rather one that by design reflects the ongoing negotiated needs and expertise of all parties involved. (Leonard & Haynes, 2010, p. 289, emphasis my own)

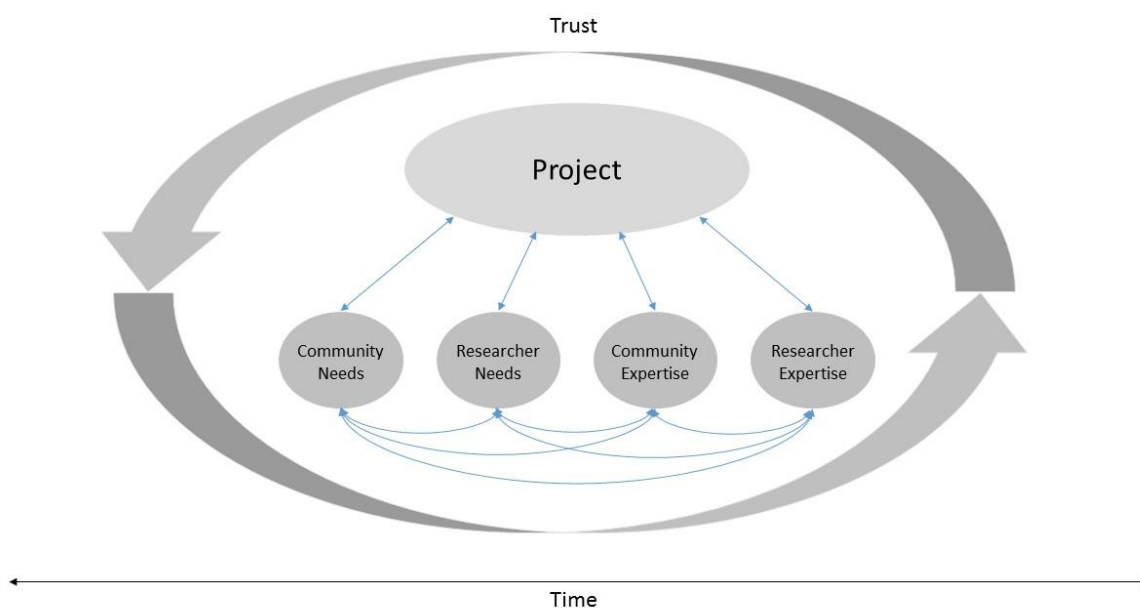
The illustration in Figure 4 suggests equal spheres of influence, as represented by the equal size of the circle which encompasses researcher's needs, community's needs, researcher's expertise, and community's expertise. I do not believe, though, that the explanation provided by Leonard and Haynes, which I have quoted above, suggests equal spheres of influence according to them: the community is expressing its expectations, and the researcher is conducting work within certain parameters. A model of collaborative research needs to note that it is equally important that the researcher expresses their expectations, while community members conduct work within parameters that are realistic to the situation (cf. Leonard & Haynes quote, presented above).

If we continue to examine the quote above, I notice that the authors talk about community expectations. I do not think expectations can be talked about in complete isolation from the goals and outcomes of the research, as is suggested. "Conducting work", on the other hand, is associated with what you put into a project, and how you carry out your work.

I would like to note here that Leonard & Haynes' arrows point only into the project. I will use the term 'synapse' to illustrate where an arrowhead is – a connection between person and project. You can see in figure 4 that there are only synapses *into* the project. With this in mind, I assert that the input *and* output synapses are both crucial to collaborative research, including in the design phase, and should be included from the initial design phases of the research. Furthermore, the Leonard and Haynes model focuses all efforts toward the project, and neglects to include synapses directly between researchers and community members. Relationships between researcher and community likely will not, and I believe should not, be formed solely around the project.

A key addition to Leonard and Hayne’s model of truly collaborative fieldwork is “mutual relationship-building, major tenets of which are time and trust” (p. 288). This is illustrated in figure 4 by arrows between community and researcher going in both directions denoting “Trust” and “Time”. I find, though, that figure 4 does not clearly lay out the relationship between trust, time and parties involved.

With the issues I have raised in mind, I propose a model as follows.



*Figure 5: Proposed Model of Truly Collaborative Fieldwork. Illustrating partnerships that extend beyond connections solely made through “the project”*

You will notice some major design differences. First, I have placed all members on the same level, as well as the same size, to further demonstrate that they are all equally as important. While time is linear with no beginning or end, trust is cyclical and continually builds upon past and shared experiences through both the project, and the relationships developed between community and researcher. Trust is also not only built between community and researcher, but

also between need and expertise. As time goes on and the project develops, a level of trust is built such that the expertise matches the needs through shared experiences.

In Figure 5, you can also see that the researcher and community can express their needs between themselves, without going through the project. These needs could be direct project related needs, but through this model, needs can be extended to include indirect project needs (like childcare, advice on living in a new place, providing references for jobs, etc.). Figure 5 further highlights the inherent interconnectedness of the design of the project and the community. For example, if we look at the researchers needs, we see clearly that their needs are interconnected with not only their own expertise, but also, those of community members, and the needs of the community members. Arrows flowing from the project back into the researcher and community reflect the fact that the needs of each party may be influenced as other parties are putting efforts into the project. This proposed model, based on Leonard & Haynes' (2010) model, focuses on partnerships, relationships and connections between the community and the researcher. Though it is messier and more complex, this is sometimes the reality of human relationships. I developed this model to better understand my role and relationship with the community within which I was working.

### 3.2.3 In which we move from *Collaborations* to *Relations*

Building partnerships and relationships in the field is an important aspect of community-based language research and collaborative methods. Guérin & Lacrampe (2010) reflect on their experiences as first-time fieldworkers who attempt to rid themselves of the 'lone-wolf' title that many (student) linguists struggle to shake off. They suggest two difficulties students face in undertaking collaborative projects. First, graduate students are usually working on smaller scale language projects that do not involve a team of scholars, and second, they note that students

often do not undertake projects that are of obvious value for language communities. While the project is not a part of a large-scale project, I wanted to ensure that it is valuable to the North Slave Métis community. Integrating the community's goals into the project, integrating oneself into the community by learning some of the language, establishing honest and dependable relationships, and being involved in social activities over time, as well as sustaining relationships outside of fieldwork are ways Guérin & Lacrampe (2010) suggest to engage with the community, and are suggestions which I take to heart.

The four "R"s of ethical research are: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). By embracing these four key elements of research, we work toward promoting more equitable *relationships* between researcher and (Indigenous)<sup>22</sup> community. Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith (2010) add *relationality* as a 5<sup>th</sup> R. It is through relationality that ongoing, intimate relationships are created, and Indigenous ways of knowing can be understood and embraced.

Hopkins (2012) offers a research model based on relationships. This model is called *Relational Flow Frames (RFF)*<sup>23</sup>. Relationships are at the heart of the four components of RFF, which are relational emergence, relational flow, relational convergence, and relational continuity. Hopkins, like other non-Aboriginal researchers working in Aboriginal settings, encountered difficulty when recruiting participants in the traditional Western academic manner of a posting a poster or flyer, inviting people to contact the researcher. After some time with little success

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<sup>22</sup> By embracing the 4 Rs, strong relationships can grow between researcher and any community. Putting respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility first also works toward addressing any power imbalances which might be perceived between researcher and participant.

<sup>23</sup> Hopkins' RFF are built upon Wilson's (2008) work on relational accountability. Wilson, S (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Toronto: Fernwood.

reaching her sample population, she asked a community member who she had a prior relationship with and who would be a good candidate to contribute to her research if he would like to participate. He agreed, and subsequently introduced Hopkins to other candidates. Initially, this looks like snowball sampling, but Hopkins notes that there is a deeper relationship criterion in how she was able to reach participants. She therefore described it as “relational sampling.”

*Relational emergence* grew from relational sampling, and involves the emergence of relationships in the research process. Researchers are typically trained to be objective, but when engaged in social research, or life in small northern communities, one may be exposed to stories and situations which evoke emotions. Hopkins notes that “engaging in these stories of others was part of the sense-making process, seeking to understand the experiences of others from the inside, while simultaneously sharing a lived experience of their expression” (p. 179). Moments shared between researcher and community member constitute the emergence of relationships.

Hopkins defines *relational flow* as “the everyday lived experiences of authentic relationships interwoven within the research process” (p. 180). Relationship flow goes beyond research relationships. It refers to the natural, human-based conversations and interactions that we, as humans, have with one another. Hopkins states:

In my journal I used the words vulnerability, empathy, resonance, and connection repeatedly. I was conscious of the quandary of a Western science model that considers this empathetic attunement inappropriate for empirical research. Yet, in contrast, this phase was crucial in relating the study’s purpose of deepening the understanding of Tłıchq high school graduates. (p. 180)

As relationships form, they move from the “emergence” stage, to the “flow” stage, where conversation is more open, flowing, and conversational in nature.

*Relational convergence* is a way to frame data analysis, in which analysis is seen as a convergence of the researcher’s experiences, and the lived experiences of the community



members as told through their stories and interviews. This Relational Flow Frame is described by Hopkins:

Relational convergence as a frame scopes momentum – some form of synergistic growth where the whole is more than just the independent parts. Relational convergence is interdependence, the unexpected, the [“*aha!*”]<sup>24</sup> moment, or simply an outcome being met in relationally meaningful ways. The interpretive themes ... were largely what other researchers were interested in because the method is more accepted in Western science. “What did I find?” questions were the focus. The process of interpretive meaning making gradually evolved from emergence into convergence. (p. 180)

Here, multiple realities converge to form the analysis. These realities include the lived experiences of the participant - as told by them, the shared lived experience between the researcher and the participant experiencing the participant’s story together, the human relationship formed between the researcher and the participant, and the researcher’s personal relationship with the material based on their own personal reality. Your personal reality would affect how you react to, and understand, the story, and can include both “experienced” and “acquired” knowledge<sup>25</sup>. In Hopkins’ model, analysis happens when meaningful connections are made between all levels of relations.

Finally, *relational continuity* refer to the relationships which continue after research has wrapped up. It can be both physical interactions which you have with community members after the research has finished, and it can also refer to how once the research has finished, you are able to see situations in a different light. Because of the experiences gained through doing the research, and the relationships you have made, you are now able to make connections and

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<sup>24</sup> Hopkins uses the term “uh huh” moment. I chose to change it to “aha”, as uh-huh can be confused with the conversational interjection of agreement, “uh huh” often used by the listener to confirm that they are listening (as one would if they were interviewing someone). The interjection “aha!” is an exclamation of understanding, realization, or recognition, and is better used in this understanding.

<sup>25</sup> Compare, for example, a few ways to relate to a story about language shift. As a non-Aboriginal person, I have not experienced language loss, but from studying it, and immersing myself in Aboriginal language issues, I have acquired knowledge which allows me to relate. Other people, who are not familiar with Aboriginal language issues would relate to stories of language shift differently.

relations that you previously would not have been able to make. All your experiences taken together affect who you are, and how you see the world.

Hopkins' Relational Flow Frames highlights the reality of relationships in qualitative research. The four frames provide a way to think reflexively about the relationships which develop in research, and they build upon Wilson's (2004, 2008) work on relational accountability. Hopkins suggests that this model could be useful to other non-Aboriginal researchers working within northern communities. She has purposefully left the model open to be relevant to a variety of contexts. While Hopkins is an educator, and was researching resiliency among Tłıchǫ youth, this model can be equally as useful in language revitalization research.

### 3.2.4 Summary of academic context of language revitalization

In this section, I introduced a short evolution of linguistic research, and concluded that the Community-Based Language Research framework and collaborative methods are best suited for linguistic research on endangered languages. I delved deeper into collaborative methods, and spoke to the importance of relationships.

As a final note, I will leave you with something to think about: how community-based and collaborative methods are at times conflicting with academic institutionalized standards of scientific research. This is addressed by Stebbins (2012) whose work discusses the conflicting positions she finds herself in when transitioning between working in academia and as a community-based researcher. To help overcome this dilemma, she conceives of a third space within which to work when taking part in community-based collaborate language work. This space is distinct from academia and the community, and can act as a space to negotiate roles and relationships, schematized in Figure 6 below.

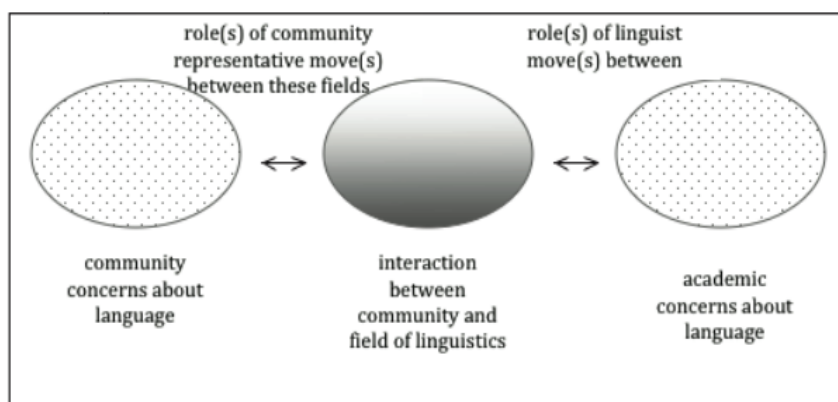


Figure 6: Stebbins' (2012) three fields of knowledge (p. 308)

In this framework, it is not required to find overlapping language concerns between the community and academia. This is something linguists have sometimes found difficult to do (see discussions in Leonard & Haynes (2010) and Nevins (2004)). Instead, this third space “accommodates and mediates interactions between community and linguistics” (Stebbins, 2012, p. 308).

It was important for me to look at the academic context of language revitalization through academic literature to understand the complexities of working with a community on language revitalization issues, and to help inform my own approach when designing the theory behind conducting a North Slave Métis language survey. Through looking at the academic context, I was reminded that the results of the survey represent only one half of the outcome of the research. The other, equally significant outcome would be the relationships I build within the community, and what I learn through doing this research. I will discuss this in Chapter 4.

### 3.3 The academic study of Métis languages

In §2.2 *The historic languages of Métis north of 60°*, I presented a brief introduction to the languages of Métis north of 60°. There are a handful of scholars who have researched Métis

language varieties. In this section, I briefly outline the diverse languages of Métis people, and provide a few references for the interested reader. It is important to provide more context on the very complicated picture of Métis languages to understand why conducting a survey of North Slave Métis languages is not as straightforward as asking someone what language they speak. Furthermore, as discussed in detail in §1.4 *Challenges* and §2.2 *The historic languages of Métis north of 60°*, the nomenclature of Métis languages is far from definite. Without a structural analysis of the Métis language that is referenced by participants who partook in the survey, I will not be able to definitively draw any conclusions on what language it is. Though, by knowing what types of Métis language varieties exist, and listening to people describe the language, it is possible to look at these categories and make a hypothesis. Therefore in this section I briefly lay out what categories have been proposed by other researchers. If you are pursuing research on Métis languages, or if you are keenly interested, I urge you to look further into this research, as I have only provided a brief overview.

### 3.3.1 Michif

Michif, is the mixed Cree-French language spoken by Métis people. It is characterized by a unique mixing of French and Cree, whereby verb phrases have their roots in Cree, and noun phrases have their roots in French. Ethnologue (2014) estimates there are 725 speakers of this language (650 in Canada, and 75 in the United States), while Papen (2007) reports that the number of speakers range between 200 and 3000 individuals, depending on what source is referenced.

Michif has been most widely studied by Peter Bakker (1997) in his seminal book *A Language of Our Own: The genesis of Michif, the mixed Cree-French language of the Canadian Métis*. Prior to Bakker, John Crawford (1985a; 1985b) worked extensively on Michif, and

together with Patline Laverdure and Ida Rose Allard created a Michif dictionary, *The Michif dictionary: Turtle Mountain Chippewa Cree* (Laverdure, Allard, & Crawford, 1983). Linguist Richard Rhodes also extensively studied Métchif<sup>26</sup> since the 1970s, and continues to publish papers on Michif<sup>27</sup>. Robert Papen has published papers on Michif since the 1980s (Papen, 2005; 2009).

More recently, Rosen's (2007) doctoral dissertation was on Michif, and she continues to conduct research on Michif. Olivia Sammons, currently a doctoral student at the University of Alberta is also involved in Michif projects. Sammons holds a studentship from the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Project for *Documenting Michif Variation* (Hans Rausing Endangered Language Project, 2013). There are multiple online resources on Michif<sup>28</sup>, and the Louis Riel Institute has developed a DVD on speaking Michif-Cree (Louis Riel Institute, 2014). Scholar and linguist Dale McCreery is also interested in Michif, and in 2014 was looking for funding to document Michif<sup>29</sup>. An in-depth search will reveal a few more graduate students who have written a paper or thesis on Michif.

This example of Michif comes from Bakker's (1997) book, *A Language of Our Own* (page 5). In these examples, the Cree elements are italicized:

un vieux *opahikê-t ê-nôhchicikê-t*,  
an.M<sup>30</sup> old trap-he.CONJ<sup>31</sup> COMP<sup>32</sup>-trap-he.CONJ

*êkwa* un matin *ê-waniskâ-t ahkosi-w*,  
and an.M morning COMP-wake.up-he be.sick-he

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<sup>26</sup> His spelling.

<sup>27</sup> For a selection of his work, see his Berkley faculty page: <http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/person/29>

<sup>28</sup> Some of which are documented here: [michifproject.wordpress.com/links](http://michifproject.wordpress.com/links)

<sup>29</sup> See his video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvuwfBksD8Y>

<sup>30</sup> M= Masculine

<sup>31</sup> CONJ= Conjunct order verb

<sup>32</sup> COMP= Complementizer

This translates to: "An old man, a trapper, was trapping and one morning when he woke up he was sick." In it one can see elements of French and Cree.

### 3.3.2 Michif-French / Métis-French / French

There are a variety of names for the category of Métis language that is structurally closest to a variety of French: Michif-French, French-Michif, Métis-French, French, country French, among others. For the purpose of this paragraph, I will call it Métis-French. Métis-French is a variety of French spoken by Métis people. It is sometimes referred to as Michif by historians and community members. Linguist Robert Papen has published many papers on Métis-French, as well as Michif (Papen & Bigot, 2010; Papen, 1984; 1993; 2006, Papen & Marchand, 2006). Pamela Sing explores Métis literature, and has also discussed Métis-French in her work (Sing, 2010/2011). The late Métis Oblate Priest, and language activist Guy Lavallée (1939-2014), dedicated much of his work on Métis-French, and Michif (Lavalée, 1991). Some online resources can be found for Métis-French; the Louis Riel Institute has developed resources for "Michif-French", which is the name the Institute has chosen to use for Métis-French. (Louis Riel Institute, 2014). There is no formal estimation of number of speakers of this Métis language. It is difficult to estimate from census data, because people may call it Michif, in which case the numbers would be included with Michif, or, some people would record it as French, in which case it would then be included in the general numbers of people across Canada who also speak a variety of French and declare so on their census. This is not to be confused with a general Canadian French. Many Métis people, like many other Canadians, speak French as an additional language.

These examples of Métis-French, followed by an English translation, come from the resource book *Speaking Michif-French: Teacher's Manual* (Louis Riel Institute, 2013, p. 10):

Y'enmas li pwayson didan Lak Manitoba.  
There is a lot of fish in Lake Manitoba.

Li lak jel en nivayr.  
The lake freezes over in the winter.

On fay la paysh sur lak en nivayr.  
We fish on the lake in the winter.

On va o lak en Bombardier.  
We go to the lake in a Bombardier.

Contrasting with the examples of Michif above in §3.3.1, in these examples of Métis-French one does not see any Cree elements.

### 3.3.3 Cree other aboriginal languages

Many Métis people historically spoke an aboriginal language (McCarthy, 1998), some as their first language. There is a misconception which persists in some sources that any combination of local Aboriginal languages with French (and perhaps English) that Métis people use in their speech constitutes Michif. This is not the case. As is the case with Métis-French, as a variety of French that is unique to Métis communities, there are varieties of Cree and Ojibwe that are unique to Métis communities (Bakker, 1997).

### 3.3.4 Bungi

Bungi<sup>33</sup> is a variety of English historically spoken by some Métis people which is now extinct. It is a contact language that is influenced by English, Orkney, Scottish, Cree, and Ojibwe (Papen,

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<sup>33</sup> Sometimes spelled as Bungee

2007; Government of Canada, 2014). Research on Bungee has been done by Stobie (1967-1968), Blain (1989), and Gold (2007).

Gold (2007, p. 2) outlines five distinctive characteristics of Bungi, which are:

- (a) Lack of contrast between [β] and [s], resulting in sot for 'shot', sewer for 'sure', sall for 'shall' and shtory for 'story'.
- (b) Non-standard vocabulary: occasional use of Cree or Scots words such as the Scots slock 'extinguish, snuff' or the Cree apichekwani 'upside down'.
- (c) No distinction between masculine and feminine third person singular pronouns, leading to usages like My daughter he is coming.
- (d) Distinctive rhythm and stress patterns: Stobie notes that both syllables of bi-syllabic words are stressed equally, as in ca-noe, and that "the most distinctive characteristic is ... the "lilting cadence" (Stobie 1968:74). This lilt is evident in several of Stobie's 1965 taped interviews (Margaret R. Stobie Bungi Dialect Collection).
- (e) Repetition of both noun and pronoun as in My daughter he is coming or I'm just slocked it the light.

(quoted from Gold, 2007, p. 2)

### 3.3.5 English

Today, most Métis people in the English speaking parts of Canada speak English, many as a first language, or monolingually. Bakker (1997) states that some Métis people speak English with a distinct accent. To the best of my knowledge, no one has researched Métis varieties of English.

## 3.4 North Slave Métis Language Survey Methods

In §3.1 *Epistemology and Methodologies*, I described the methodological approaches which informed and framed my research. I went on to explore the academic context of language revitalization work in §3.2 *Academia and language revitalization efforts*, looking specifically at Community-based method, collaborative frameworks, and relation based models. Finally, §3.3 *The academic study of* provided a brief overview of past and contemporary research and



researchers who are looking at Métis languages. This research is not solely historically based, nor focused purely on academic theory, or theoretical linguistics. The methodologies referenced, and the work done by scholars on LR, come together to inform the design of the methods I use. In §3.4.1 to §3.4.3 to follow, I touch upon the specific methods used in administering a language survey.

### 3.4.1 Interview methods

Interviews are a method for conducting systematic social inquiry with the purpose of collecting information through interaction, and are the predominant methods of collecting data within language assessment surveys (Kluge, 2000). This project views the ‘interview as a resource’, which is a positivistic view of the interview process (Kluge, 2000; Rapely, 2004). Under this understanding, it is the belief that there is objective knowledge of the social world, and the informant holds this knowledge (Kluge, 2000). The data collected reflects the interviewee’s reality outside the interview (Rapely, 2004). Rapely (2004) reminds us that interviews are in their nature social encounters and are “irremediably collaborative”.

An extensive literature review of language surveys, some of which are presented in appendix 6, and language survey methods (Linn, 2004; Blair, 1990; Nahhas, 2007) aided in the creation of the survey which we used. I categorized all the questions from the previous language surveys that I reviewed into broad themes, to help inform the types of questions that would be beneficial to ask in the North Slave Métis context. The interview questions that I prepared and proposed in my original ethics application were then discussed with Ryan Mercredi, a Métis research assistant who is a member of the North Slave Métis Alliance and stood in as a representative of NSMA. Together, we went over each question and discussed culturally appropriate ways of phrasing them, and the significance and relevance of the question. We also

came to consensus about the broad categories of the questions: demographic information, language practices, and language attitudes. Only once we were both satisfied with all of the interview questions did we begin interviews. Over the first three interviews, some questions were altered or removed. By the fourth interview, the interview questions were finalized.

Interviews usually included one or two participants, myself, and Ryan Mercredi, or Stefany Bulmer. Stefany is also an NSMA member, and both Stefany and Ryan were trained in interview techniques and hired casually to contribute to this project. I conducted two interviews without a Métis researcher, and, upon the request of two participants, two interviews were conducted solely by the Métis researcher. Therefore, the largest interview had four participants, while the smallest interview had two individuals. The interviews were conducted wherever the participant chose and where they felt comfortable. Locations ranged from the North Slave Métis Alliance office, in participants' homes, at local coffee shops, in the hotel room in Fort Providence, and over the phone.

Interviews ranged from very structured, to very conversational. One reason for this is because as the interviewers became more familiar with the process and questions, the interviews naturally became more conversational. Also, depending on the participant's personality, some interviews tended toward more structure, while others were looser. In the spirit of sharing reciprocally, I began the interview by sharing a bit about myself with the participant. This showed the participant that my commitment to the north runs deeper than merely a job or a Master's project, which brings many young people north for a short period. It connects me to this place, to which they are also connected, and therefore, in a way built a common space from which trust could form and a relationship could be built. I then asked people to tell me about their language practices, and simply listened, attempting to create a space for conversations

about Northern Métis languages to begin. Participants were free to talk about whatever they felt was most important. This format allowed me to learn about what each individual finds important. We then would go through the questions that we had prepared. We kept track of the questions that were already answered through conversation, both mentally, and with field notes, and made sure not to ask questions that were redundant to conversation we already had. This ensured validity between participants, by making sure that all topics were covered in some depth. In conducting the interview in this manner, Stefany, Ryan and I all adopted the mindset suggested by Dwyer (2006) of mutual learner-teacher, where “I am here to learn; can you teach me?”

The interviews were recorded on a small Sony handheld audio recorder, along with field notes by myself and the co-researcher present. Participants could request the audio recorder to be turned off at any point in the interview, and the recording only began after getting verbal consent to take part in the interviews and to be recorded. Recording participants allowed me to have community voices informing, directing, and framing the research project. The participant also decided on the level of confidentiality of their interviews, in terms of how they would like to be referred to in the write-up.

### 3.4.2 Relational sampling

Participants were initially chosen by recommendations by the North Slave Métis Alliance. Another set of participants was then found through word of mouth by people who were interviewed. Altogether, twenty-four people were interviewed. Eleven of these interviews were conducted in Yellowknife, eleven were conducted in Fort Providence, and two were conducted over the phone; one with a Yellowknife resident who was in Alberta, and one with a Fort Providence resident who was in Fort Smith.

As Hopkins (2012) found, Relational Sampling is slightly different from the “snowball” method (see §3.2.3 *In which we move from Collaborations to Relations* for further discussion on this topic), as there *was* a deeper relational component. First, the vision of the project was to put community members’ voices first, and to hear their stories through our conversations. Through these types of interactions, a small relationship was built between myself, the participant, and my research assistant. Furthermore, my research assistant often knew the participant in some form, or could trace some relation to them, even if they did not know each other very well. Once this report was made, the participant often recommended a whole list of “*people who you must talk to!*” and they often helped us contact them.

### 3.4.3 Analysis methods

Once the interviews were finished, the audio files were saved to a computer and a back-up digital storage device. They were then played back on Audacity software, and were slowed down to 40% of their tempo. *Dragon NaturallySpeaking* software was used to transcribe the bulk of the interviews. This was done by listening to the slowed down interview, and repeating the interview back to the computer as I listened. The interviews were then edited. This resulted in 356 pages of transcription<sup>34</sup>. This process ensured that I had listened to, spoken aloud, and read each interview prior to beginning analysis of the content of the interviews.

The transcriptions were then coded for themes which arose in the interviews. The themes include: where is the language spoken, a description of their language, Métis identity and language, migration, intergenerational language practices, the future of their language, and

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<sup>34</sup> These transcriptions and audio recordings have been given to the NSMA for their use and caretaking into the future.

language revitalization. The interview questions were designed to access information about certain themes as we went through the question, but in reality, the participants brought up aspects of certain themes in myriad sections of the interviews, sometimes returning to a theme previously talked about, or sometimes presenting a new theme altogether which I had not anticipated.

### **3.5 Summary of Methodology and Methods**

In Chapter 3: *Methodology and Methods*, I described the overarching methodologies that inform my way of looking at the world. These include feminist and Native American methodologies. These methodologies put emphasis on the participation of all involved in the creation of knowledge. I then went on to discuss the frameworks and tools that have been used in language revitalization work done in an academic context, and developed my own model for community-based language research; one where relationships are at the heart of all interactions. I then presented some of the previous work done on Métis languages. Finally, I presented the specific methods that I would be employing while undertaking this project. These methods are grounded in the methodologies presented in the earlier sections of Chapter 3.

## Chapter 4: Reflexivity Reprise

*As a qualitative researcher I know that good reflexive practice is endemic to the fieldwork process – data collection, analysis, and writing cannot proceed without reflexivity.*

*Susan B. Murray, 2003  
p. 381*

Every interaction is a collision of a thousand different stories. Each individual brings with them a lifetime of experiences and knowledge. Structures within which interactions take place can be disassembled – the physical realities of the interaction, the larger social structure, or the political realities in which it takes place. For me, reflexivity is the process of recognizing this, while being true to yourself.

I have hinted at the concept of *reflexivity* throughout this paper. Reflexivity involves self-reflection and self-critique; recognizing that I have a role in the construction of the meaning of the results, and the acknowledging and critiquing of my own biases and assumptions which influence all aspects of designing and conducting a language survey (Sullivan, 2009; Begoray & Banister, 2010). Using reflexivity as a tool through journaling my experiences and emotional reactions throughout the research, can result in a more open-ended, multi-voiced research project, where one can go beyond creating knowledge to commenting on how knowledge is created (Arber, 2006).

In interviewing participants I had the role of a researcher. Researchers are traditionally thought of as holding the role of observer, but, in my interactions with the community members, I naturally leaned closer to being a participant. The lump in my throat told me that I was sharing their stories in my heart. There are no clear boundaries between observer and participant, and

rather than spending energy constantly analysing my role in the interview setting, I chose to be present in the moment, and would let myself slip effortlessly closer to the role of participant and learner. Ethnography often encourages researchers to balance a position between observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer (Arber, 2006). But *balancing* is a difficult act<sup>35</sup>.

Balancing requires practice and falling a few times is inevitable. Some researchers use this as an argument for positioning yourself more squarely in the role of observer (Frank, 2004, cited in Arber, 2006). The “temptation to convert” to the role of participant when engaged in emotional research is a pull felt, and denied, by many researchers. Murray (2003) notes that the identity negotiations which envelop fieldwork are a key element in the process of becoming a moral researcher. There are times and places where a researcher must play the role of observer, and there are situations where it is okay to let yourself slide into the role of participant. In this section I present three stories that stand out for me as part of this research project.

In the following section I present three short reflections on times in this research process that have stood out for me. In them, I reflect on some challenges and internal conflicts which I was faced with, as well as some joys of conducting research.

#### **4.1 A few of my own reflections**

##### **Part 1: Ethics**

My first major dilemma was when I was confronted with completing the *University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research*. I understood the importance of complying with ethical standards and protocols, and

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<sup>35</sup> Try yoga, ballet, or unicycling.

why these types of processes have been put in place. At their core, they are there to protect people from harm. Of course, I would never intend to harm anyone, but the sterile-ness of the form, the initial impression of limits and boundaries weighed on me. I was specifically overwhelmed by the section on consent. I felt that the application pushed me toward seeking written consent, where I would present participants with a lengthy document and get written consent to participate. I was immediately uncomfortable. How many forms like this had I signed before, and how did signing them make me feel? I slipped myself into the role of participant and imagined how I would feel starting off my interactions with someone by being presented a long document, and asked to sign it. I didn't want to start like that. I didn't want the act of signing something make people feel like they were giving away their knowledge. I wanted to start off on the right foot, I wanted to share, and to learn. Yet, *I* don't want to harm people. I proposed that I would seek verbal consent. This required me to clearly justify why verbal consent was absolutely necessary for this project. Luckily, my reasoning was accepted, and I was able to obtain verbal consent for all my interviews.

What would it have meant if I was required to obtain written consent? I would not have felt comfortable asking people for written consent. It would have required me to begin my interactions in a place of extreme awkwardness and discomfort. This is not to say that every graduate student conducting linguistic research should request to obtain verbal consent. It is what I felt moral doing, and it reflected who I am.

## Part 2: Lunch at the Snowshoe Inn

Stefany Bulmer, who was assisting me with a variety of aspects of the research, joined me on a trip to Fort Providence to interview some Northern Métis language speakers. For four days, Stef and I ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner together at the Snowshoe Inn Café. The café is a warm



space, with large windows overlooking the main road. There are images of community members, elders, and town landscapes sprinkled on the walls. Every day, Stef and I would gaze at one picture in particular. It was of an older man, wearing a hat overlooking the Grande Rivière, as the Mackenzie River is known by Métis people in Fort Providence. It was an image of Stef's late uncle, and I could tell that the image spoke to her. I noted the name of the photographer, and when we came back to Yellowknife, I emailed the photographer by chance to see if I could buy a print as a Christmas gift for Stef. The photographer happily emailed me the photo, which I printed, framed, and wrapped up with a bow.

I am lucky to live in the same house in Yellowknife that Rene Fumoleau lived in; I sit writing my thesis where he sat and wrote some of his influential books. It is a wonderfully warm old house, so old, in fact, that there is no plumbing. Stefany kindly invites me over to her house while we re-listen to the interviews, and insists that I bring a load of laundry, or offers me a towel for a warm shower.

For me, these types of relationships that I have made that go beyond conducting a language survey are essential. It goes beyond what should be done, or what a certain framework recommend you do. We do it because we care. We do it because that is who we are.

### Part 3: Writing

How long did it take me to write my thesis? I tend to adopt the philosophy that things will happen when they are meant to happen. Things will fall into place. I struggle to write, as likely many graduate students struggle to write. I find it difficult, not because I have writers block, or find the act of writing onerous, but because there is a certain sureness that comes with writing things down. Part of the process of being reflexive, is opening yourself, and your mind to all the

possibilities. In writing things down, it feels like there is a level of finality, or completion, but I recognize that this is not the end, nor will it ever be completed. There is always another angle.

I have been a student for 23 years. It has taken me some time to recognize that finishing writing does not mean that I am finished learning. Being a student has taught me the value of questioning, critical examination, and research. These characteristics have become part of who I am. Though my writing, for now, may be coming to a hiatus, these aspects of me will still be there.

## **4.2 From theory to practice**

In Chapter 3, *Methodologies and Methods*, I spoke to the theories which informed this project, and the frameworks that are used by other linguists while undertaking Indigenous language research. In this chapter, I have reflected on some of my experiences through the research process.

While the methodologies and frameworks discussed in Chapter 3 provide an ideal, the reality is that research is difficult and time consuming. Many frameworks place high levels of collaboration as something to strive for, and indeed, I wanted to also conduct my research in collaboration and partnership with the NSMA, and the community within which I was working. That being said, as a Master's student, I had the luxury of dedicating up to 100% of my time on this project. This wasn't the case for anyone else. People have jobs, families, and commitments beyond this project; the NSMA has other mandates that they are busy fulfilling. I recognize that I was incredibly lucky to engage with Stefany Bulmer and Ryan Mercredi, who were interested, engaged and excited to work with me, and provide their perspective and guidance on the project.

But as Ryan reminded me, “*You* are doing your Master’s in this. People are looking to *you* for some of the answers.”

This causes me to reflect on collaboration, in practice, and relationships, in practice. For me, throughout this project, in practice, the ideal levels of collaboration that I initially envisioned were not possible, but, in practice, making good relationship with those who I worked with was something that I had control of, and that I could do. We all need to conduct ourselves in a good way. Through this trust can built, and, it is my sentiment that without good relations, we will not have effective collaborations. In Chapter 5 to follow, I present the results of the North Slave Métis language survey through the voices of community members who I interviewed.

## Chapter 5: The North Slave Métis Language Survey

A language survey is designed to find out some specific questions about a language group. In the case of the North Slave Métis community there was so little published information about the language, that any information was new. Not only did we set out to find out some basic demographic information about the language – where it is spoken, how many speakers there are, what ages the speakers are – but we also wanted to capture the feelings of the Métis community at this time. Ryan and I designed the survey so we would find out where participants think their language is headed, if the language is important to them, if the community members associated a language with their culture, and what they feel should be done. If possible, we also wanted to find out what the language sounded like, to try to put a finger on exactly what variety of Métis language was and is spoken in this region. This section reports those results through the voices of the community members. In this section, I am reporting on the voices of Métis people. Therefore, here, at times I set aside the term Northern Métis language and mirror the terminology that each participant uses.

### 5.1 Description of the Northern Métis language

Let us begin by finding out how community members hear and describe the language. We wanted to determine if the language spoken was Michif (the Cree-French language described in §3.3.1 *Michif*), a variety of French, or, was there no commonality of languages between people I interviewed, in which case “Michif” would just refer to ‘the way Métis people speak’. A good portion of people who were interviewed had never heard the language spoken, did not speak the language, or had not spoken it for a long time. Descriptions were based on stories passed on

through families, knowledge gained from reading books, or memories of times long ago. Others who were interviewed still spoke the language, and their descriptions included examples of them speaking Michif. Ryan Mercredi describes the ambiguous nature of Michif:

I'm not completely informed, but I think these terms [Michif and Métis-French] are somewhat interchangeable ... I think what people call Michif here, is more sort of just associated with Métis speech patterns. Maybe Métis languages are languages other than English, I would say, and tending toward similarities to French, is what I would gather. I know that in other parts of Canada, and the United States for that matter, that what is called Michif is more of a mixed language, like a combination of Cree and French, with Ojibway influences. ... I know that *what Michif is* sort of hard to pin down. I think for me going forward, I want to be able to pin it down a little bit, so that I'm coming from a more informed position when I talk to people about it. (Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 36)

Other people remember hearing the language as similar to French. Elder Edward Jones describes the languages that were spoken in Fort Resolution, where he grew up. You can see how the lines of what is considered French and Michif differ between person to person through our conversation:

Ed Jones: In Fort Res[olution] it was Chipewyan, English, and Michif. They say they spoke "French", but as far as I know it was Michif because they didn't speak—how would I best put it—they didn't speak grammatical French. It was like, well, I know you don't like my using 'corrupted French', but that's what was spoken<sup>36</sup>. Susan: No, no, that's fine. Ed Jones: Michif, Michif. But I meet the odd person now and then, and they say, "Remember when we used to speak French?" we never really spoke French. Although I took French in school, but in the community, it was Michif. They called it French. ... I think when you say Métis-French, I think of Michif. [...] Because the Michif that they spoke to me sounded like corrupted French. Like they were attempting to speak French properly, but they're thinking in essentially, I guess, it's Chipewyan. So their pronunciations were a little off, I would say. Some of them were quite good at pronouncing French words. ... I think my mom spoke Michif, although she thought she was speaking French. But I believe it was Michif. ... Michif is just the language that the natives put together having associated with the French. Some of them married French, and down the line they married Métis and that carried on. (Edward Jones transcript, p. 29-31)

Elder Tony Whitford is a great storyteller. He speaks primarily English now, but when he was Speaker of the House in the Northwest Territories Legislature, it was his goal to conduct a whole session in French. Though he never completed that goal, he nevertheless is very proficient

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<sup>36</sup> In the past, Ed Jones was chastised by another "expert" for describing the language as *corrupted French*, which is why he says "I know you don't like my using corrupted French." The *you* refers to academics/language researchers. I was open to people describing it however they liked.

in French, and is able to carry on a conversation. Let Tony describe here what he considers the difference between Métis-French and Michif:

I think that Métis-French and Michif are synonymous. I think they're the same... That's just me, I could be proven wrong. I don't think there is a vocabulary anywhere written, that states *this is Michif*, and *this is how you have to say it*. I don't think that exists. You have a French book. French dictionary and English dictionary. You have Cree, written out in Cree, you know, some places, in syllabics, or Roman orthography, but there's the word. In Inuktitut, you have syllabics, and you have it in Roman as well. Michif. I don't think there exists a book that's written strictly in Michif. I could be wrong, but I don't think there's much of a difference. I think it's what you want it to be. If you happen to speak Chipewyan, and French, and English, you are going to be able to speak Michif. You combine that to whatever's convenient to you. If you like Cree, you like Chipewyan, and you're speaking that, but you don't have a word, you're going to pop right over to French, you're going to pop over to English. I don't think there's a word in Cree for an airplane, but you have to describe that in the Chipewyan languages, or Cree. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 29)

Like Edward Jones, Tony also was once chastised for trying to describe the language:

I know I got heck for saying it, that Michif was broken French. But that's the only way I can understand it, if you're asking my opinion, that's it. Is there any difference? No. And that's what I wondered about. Can people who are promoting it, are they able to come up with a vocabulary, a written vocabulary, of Michif? Or carry a whole conversation in Michif? You know, I listened to one of them one time and I said, "You're speaking French, with a different accent." Not to downplay Michif, I'm sure that there's some places like in Manitoba. That priest said, "Oh no, this is what you speak, and this is Michif, and it's clear. And you don't know what you're talking about, Whitford," he said. And so it was, "Oh okay, sorry about that," I said. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 29)

This is how Stefany Bulmer describes the relation between French, Métis-French, and Michif. Stefany grew up in a house where she heard her mother speaking Michif and has some basic understanding of the language, though she never spoke it, and does not consider herself a speaker.

I hear a lot of Tłı́chǫ spoken in Yellowknife. I also hear French spoken around Yellowknife, because the government has a lot of French workers, I hear a lot of French. But I don't understand *that* French. And my mom said that's not the same French that's mixed into the Michif. ... It is France-French that's in Michif. But some of the French speakers here call it lazy French, or sloppy French, but it's France-French that is a part of Michif. [Susan: So. what, if any, is the difference between Métis-French and Michif?] Métis-French and Michif are the same, they're together. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 18)

Stefany's mother, Roberta Bulmer spoke Michif as a first language, and still speaks it with her family members to this day. Here she teases out some of the people with whom you would speak Michif and with whom you would speak French.

In our house amongst ourselves we spoke Michif, or amongst other Métis people it was Michif. If the nuns or priests came around my grandparents would speak French to them, because they knew the

Parisian-French. [...] Well, I imagine my mom spoke Michif and English, but she understood Slavey, and the French spoken by the missionaries. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 4; p. 6)

Evelyn D'Hont describes her parents' speech patterns. She was exposed to two varieties of French.

Well, my mom came from Fort Providence, and she spoke French. I don't know if that was Michif, or what, because she didn't define it. But it could've been because my dad also spoke French. They just spoke French to each other at home, and not to us kids, so we didn't learn a word of French. And their French wasn't identical; there were differences in their French. My dad had Belgian French, from Manitoba, they emigrated from Belgium. And so the French my mom spoke, Fort Providence French, there could have been some Michif in there, I don't know. (Evelyn D'Hont transcript, p. 1)

Brothers Freddie and James Christie speak the language fluently and still speak it in their community and with their family.

Freddy: People would say it's not really real French. I remember them saying that. You know when I went to school. So I often wondered, "What kind of language do I speak anyway?" ... James: A lot of the Slavey, if you look at it carefully, it has all Michif words, there are many in there. Le cafe, le té, le chapeau, etc., all those words they come from the Métis. (Christie family transcript, p. 1; p. 4)

Elder Gilbert Bouvier lived in Fort Providence and spoke the Northern Métis language fluently. He describes some differences between the two varieties of French spoken in Fort Providence when he was a child.

In school, it was a different style of French than what was spoken in the community. Most of the Grey Nuns that were teaching, most of them came from around Montréal, and around Québec. And that's all that they were speaking was straight French. The fathers and brothers and all of them spoke straight French. And all of the native people that went to school in the old days they all spoke French. Slavey and French, you know, eh, but they spoke more French when they were in town with the local people because all of the Métis people spoke French. Laffertys and Bouviers<sup>37</sup>. [...] Susan: So, is the style of French that you speak different from Québec French? Gilbert: Yeah, yeah, I have a hard time understanding some of the French people that I know who talk French to me. Even truck drivers I know... guys that are hauling fuel<sup>38</sup>, I know a few guys who are French-Canadian, and I talk French with them, and when they start talking to me sometimes I get lost, I don't know what they're talking about. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 2; p. 4)

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<sup>37</sup> Prevalent Métis names in the region

<sup>38</sup> Fort Providence is approximately half way between High Level, Alberta, and Yellowknife, NT and is the only place in between to get gas. Subsequently, the gas station, "Big River" is a popular pit-stop for travellers, and hang-out for locals.

In Fort Providence we met mother and daughter Leoni Lafferty, and Cheryl Gargon<sup>39</sup> (nee Lafferty). As a mother of young children, Cheryl is trying to think of ways that her kids can learn some Métis-French in a time where fewer people are speaking it. We chatted about the similarities and difference between Métis-French and Québec-French, and if knowing one language would help with learning the other. Here, we see that not only varieties are different, but there are different boundaries to transcend as well.

Susan: Do you think that if kids were to learn the Quebec variety of French, would that help a little bit with the Métis-French? Cheryl: I don't know, it's different, eh? Leoni: My daughter's kids all talk French, but it's a different French than us. Cheryl: Both of their kids are in French school [French immersion], and, how can I say this. [Pause]. They had a hard time with going into the French school, because of their backgrounds, because she is – her husband is under Tłıchǫ and they were questioning them, why do you want your kids to learn French, when they should learn Dogrib. Basically. And then, what she had to do was to inform people about *her* history and *her* background and where we came from, as Métis people and to incorporate French with her kids. So it's kind of hard, she had a hard time putting them into French school. Because they didn't know what a Métis was. [...] [My sister] knows more [French] than me. Well I guess because her kids are, her kids go to the French school. But the pure French is more, she's catching onto it, than compared to what we speak, than the Michif-French. [...] My sister probably speaks the 'real deal French', but my grandma would say "it is different, I don't understand." (Leoni Lafferty and Cheryl Gargon transcript, p. 4; p. 5, p. 14)

Louis Constant told us about how the language of the community was influenced by French speaking missionaries.

Susan: The missionaries and your family, they could understand each other's French? Louis: Yes. [...] It was hard for the missionaries to talk English because they were from Québec. So they mostly taught the people in town how to talk in French. Susan: So, now the French that is spoken, I don't know if you would know this, but is it like the French that was spoken by the Métis people before the missionaries came, or is it sort of influenced by what the people learned from the missionaries, their French? Louis: For me I think it was both. Because, Métis, apparently they came from northern Alberta. And when they moved to town here, they introduce that language to the people. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 1-2)

I sat down and spoke with Elder George Mandeville and his son Lee Mandeville. Here, George gives us an example of how their language differs from Quebecois French.

I remember one time we were sitting around and having a coffee downtown and Ernie McLeod, Bob McLeod's<sup>40</sup> brother, and he was saying I am bilingual, you know, and we said give us an example,

<sup>39</sup> Cheryl, in her late 20s or early 30s, is the youngest Métis-French speaker that we met while doing this research.

<sup>40</sup> Bob McLeod is currently the premier of the Northwest Territories (2014).



and he said, well give me something in English and I'll give it to you in French, so I says say "do you speak French?", how do you say that, and he says 'de parleches<sup>41</sup> français à toi' you see, I mean that's... and actually in French it's "parlez-vous français" but he said in Michif "parleches français à toi". So there's a difference, a French man will still understand what I'm saying. So it's just an example of Michif. [Pause]. "De Parleches". That's not even proper French, if you took basic French that's not something that they say, but it is common amongst the Métis to talk like that, and it's just an example. [...] And even the French that you learn in school, it doesn't even sound anything like what we learned as kids, at home, so yeah, we were basically told "hey, don't speak it like that, here is the proper way!" and that's it, so you're kind of like embarrassed about it. [...] I don't know why some of the phrases were changed so much, you know? (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 7; p. 8)

While George asserts that the variety of French spoken in the North Slave region is different from the variety of French spoken in Quebec, he does draw similarities to other varieties of French.

Well, probably if you went to New Orleans it would help you, because I have heard people say that their French is very similar to Michif up here. [...] Some of the phrases are identical, Freddie<sup>42</sup> was saying that he went there. Freddie's been to New Orleans and he was said he was able to mix in with the common folk there, and he fit right in, it was amazing he said. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 17)

Edward Mercredi similarly described the language as similar to New Orleans French.

When I was in New Orleans a couple years ago, and I could understand those guys down there perfectly. [...] The nuns and priests spoke the old French. Like, say, my grandfather, and my grandmother, they all spoke the old French. See the reason for French being [inaudible] was the fur trade, and perhaps also the aboriginal groups speaking a broken French, so you would be mixing down south with Cree. And then up here it would be mixed with Slavey and Chipewyan. Just the odd word, here and there. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p3; p. 5)

From the community's description of the language, we can conclude that the language (traditionally) spoken by Métis people in the North Slave region is a variety of French.

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<sup>41</sup> In IPA: /paʁlɛtʃɛj/

<sup>42</sup> Freddie Christie was interviewed as well.

## 5.2 Where is the Northern Métis language spoken?



Figure 7: Map of the Northwest Territories, with community names (NWT Bureau of Statistics)<sup>43</sup>

We also wanted to know what the distribution of this language was across the Northwest Territories. Was it localized to a few communities, or common to other Métis communities across Canada? In this section, people teach us about where they have heard the Northern Métis language spoken.

Edward Jones remembers the language being spoken in Fort Resolution and Yellowknife (refer to Figure 7: Map of the Northwest Territories, with community names (NWT Bureau of Statistics)).

I don't speak Michif, but I've heard it spoken at Fort Resolution, and in Yellowknife, by elders, back in the '40s. The elders, people I consider elders were over 60 years old. [...] In [Fort] Resolution there was Michif, Chipewyan, mostly. (Edward Jones transcript, p. 3; p. 10)

<sup>43</sup> Map accessed from: <http://www.statsnwt.ca/community-data/>

Stefany Bulmer spent a lot of her childhood visiting family in Fort Providence. There, she recounts people speaking *Michif* to each other.

In Providence people still speak Michif, like, when they see each other, like even at Walmart in Yellowknife, they just speak in Michif to each other. [...] And even in Rae, and Providence... and Simpson people speak Michif. (Stefany Bulmer transcript p. 23; p. 24)

Roberta Bulmer also tells us that the language was spoken by Métis people in Fort Smith.

Well, Fort Smith is very much a Métis community, and still is today. My mom would probably know a lot of people there that, and she had relatives there, so they spoke Michif. And I think some of them still do, because I run into the old-timers now and again, but when [my mother] moved to BC and Yukon, I guess she was very lonely and there was nobody else that spoke that language. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 7)

Sonia Minoza grew up in Fort Providence, and had some exposure to Métis-French. At the time of our interview, she was living in Fort Smith attending post-secondary education. Regarding Métis-French being spoken in Fort Smith today, she says, “I don’t hear people speaking Michif in Fort Smith, but I have a classmate who mentioned that her grandmother speaks it here [in Fort Smith].” (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 4)

Today in Yellowknife, Roberta explains what it is like to find speakers in Yellowknife:

Well, when you're living in Yellowknife, you don't meet a lot of Métis people, and even if you do, some of them don't speak the language. But the ones that do, sometimes when there's a big gathering, we like to throw a few jokes around. We have a good time that way. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 11)

Lawrence Mercredi thinks that Michif was also spoken in Fort Chipewyan, as that is where his parents were from.

My parents were born in Fort Chipewyan. Susan: And what languages did they know? Lawrence: I think they probably did know Michif. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 5)

Kurtis Bulmer, Stefany’s brother, describes that Métis people spoke different languages with certain people within their own community.

They used it for trading with the Hudson Bay, the Métis had their own language because they were half-breeds, half-native-half-white, so they would speak fluent Slavey with the natives or the Aboriginals whenever they were together, and they would speak what the white people spoke, French and English, so Michif was their language. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 6)

Gilbert Bouvier notes that the same language is spoken outside the territories.

I'm comfortable in my own language, and in Fort Resolution it's the same thing. You go to Resolution, the Beaulieu's most of them speak French, the Balsillie's, them too. Yeah, [in Fort Resolution] they speak straight French, just like us. Fort Smith it's the same thing, Fort Chip[ewyan], I think Fort Chip a lot of people talk straight French the way we talk, and from there it goes right down to Saskatchewan, I think. Yeah, they talk straight French like us, I heard some interviews on the radio years ago. SS: And this is the Métis French? GB: Yeah it's the same French as what my mom and dad spoke. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 8)

Gilbert recounts a story of meeting someone in Tsiigehtchic, formerly called Arctic Red River, who spoke French, like him.

In 1973 when I went North there with the company working for, we stopped in Arctic Red, and there was a woman, that old lady who I was talking to who used to write letters to your granny, Celine, she was living right on the river bank there in Arctic Red River, I didn't know, but I knew her name is Odette [laugh], and Odette was her name, I didn't know her last name, but her first name is Odette. And then went to buy dry fish, me and my uncle Gabe. [...] But it hit me right there, then, I knew who she was. Her too, she was talking straight French just like us, she went to school in the convent they were brought up together in the old days, they were too far to be sent home, so they just kept them. Today there is hardly anybody around to talk French. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 8-9)

Gilbert also remembers working on the boats and coming to town and hearing predominantly French amongst the Métis.

When I went to Fort Smith in 1955, or it was 1956, I was working on the boat, and dad is on another boat, the river pilot for Radium to Yellowknife, the two of us met in Smith, and he took me up town with him, to the Mercredi's, so the minute we walked into those houses like visiting people around before going back to the boat, everybody spoke French. Everybody was talking French. Everybody. I thought, gee, that's got to be the capital of French people here, the Métis people here. Everybody spoke French, nobody spoke a word of English, that I remember, but if you went there now hardly anybody wants to talk French except for maybe a few. Oh, but they talk Chip, oh boy they talk a lot Chip, [Susan: in Ft Smith?] Ya, it's the same thing with Resolution, they talk Chip. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 12)

In Hay River, though, Gilbert does not remember French being spoken.

In Hay River, most of people who live on the west channel who came up from Manitoba and Saskatchewan and places too, they were fishermen too; they speak Cree. And the kids, that's all that they could talk is Cree. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 13)

In summary, Louis Constant puts it this way:

So maybe if you are to make a dictionary, everyone from way up the river, like Fort Norman, all the way down to Fort Res they would be able to recognize what is written in the book. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 13)

### 5.3 Identity

*“Michif is important because my ancestors spoke Michif, and language diversity is important. And I think language sort of gives us a window into our heritage.”*

*Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 39*

*“Well, Michif is a part of Métis culture. It is. But we weren't living in that cultural world anymore.”*

*Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 12*

It is often said that language and culture are intertwined. In speaking with community members this is a theme that surfaced in a variety of ways. People shared with us both what it means to be Métis in the North and how, if at all, language is a part of their culture.

Tony Whitford describes what being Métis means to him:

What does it mean to be Métis in the north? Well, it means more today than it did years ago. Of course, because I think more Métis are becoming more proud of being Métis. And when I was growing up, we weren't Métis, you know, it was... The word is actually Métisse. It's a French word, and it describes sort of mixed-blood, and Métisse, and—it's got a little hyphen on one of the letters there—but, I was, I grew up as, a half-breed. And to me, it didn't bother me, as long as they didn't use it in a mean sense. From time to time, it did happen. You know, “you damn half-breeds.” That was bad. But being a half-breed was fine. Because I looked at some of the southern half-breeds, people like Louis Riel, and those guys, you know, they led the half-breed group, they led the half-breed colonists, and stuff like that. So it was used well. But sometimes it was a derogatory term. So then later on of course it became Métisse, and now Métis [pronounced: matey], so it's almost like you're a sailor, or something. I'm much more proud of it today than I am, than I was before, because I never thought of it before. You know, it was just me. And, you know, I was me, and I did my thing, and if anybody got a little too nasty with this half-breed stuff, you know, I'd... they'd end up with a punch in the mouth or a kick in the ass, and then they quit doing that, see. So... I wasn't a bully, but I didn't take any guff. So now today I wear Métis as much as I can. I have a sash, I have different sashes, I have a vest, different kinds of ones there. You know, traditional shirt, a couple of them, but I also use contemporary clothing. I change back and forth, and I tell people that there's no exact formula, this is not “You cannot be a Métis unless you wear this kind of clothes. You cannot be Métis unless you do this.” Métis can be anything you want. And a Métis to me is a very adaptive person. Somebody that looks at what's available and says, “I like that. It's going to enhance my life. I think I'll pick that up as mine.” So I do that. I learn this, I learn that, and then it becomes me after a while. So when I say that to people, “let's look at who Métis are,” you know, they're a group of people that are neither Indian, neither Indian or white, they're a mixture of both. And I like to sometimes say with great pride that it was only the strongest Aboriginal people that got in contact with the strongest non-Aboriginal people. Two good cultures meeting and blending, and I say, what do you have? You know, you have a real good mixture there. Very strong, proud people. That's the Métis. And we were never looked at as Indians, because the Indians had a treaty which barred us from being part of that particular type of a

culture, and we weren't white, so we had to paddle our own canoe. That's why we became very independent. Métis, very independent. They've got their own houses, they've got their own businesses, they drive vehicles of their own. They work anywhere they want. They do anything they want. Whereas sometimes I think the treaties have held people back. You cannot do certain things on a reserve, and if you don't move off the reserve, you stay there and you get what you get. If you move off, again, you're sometimes ostracized, so you can't do anything, you know. I think it was a hindrance. To us, Métis were free to do what they wanted, and that's where I'm coming from. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 5)

Being Métis is an important aspect of Stefany Bulmer's identity. Here is how she describes being Métis in the North.

Well, I'm proud to be a Métis. I love my culture. I share two worlds. I share obviously a Caucasian world from my dad, from New Brunswick, and I share an Aboriginal culture with my mom. More so Aboriginal, because my dad's family is from New Brunswick. So I kind of felt like I have the best of both worlds. I have a strong connection to being Métis. I feel that it's my identity, that's who I am. I self-identify as a Métis person because I'm proud to be one. [...] Well my mom always told me to be proud of who I am. And I kind of felt like it was hard to fit in, because if I say I'm Métis, I'm right away judged because I'm light. You know, like, "How are you Métis?" That's how it's responded to. And I had trouble with that. I'd be like, "Maybe I shouldn't say I'm Métis, mom." And my mom was like, "But you are. That's who you are. That's your culture. That's your identity. And be proud of it." You know, she said people will always find something to say. "Oh, your hair is too red," or if not your hair, then something. "You're not supposed to be blonde." And I almost felt like I may be living a lie saying I'm in a Métis person because of me being so light. But, there are treaty people who are blonde and blue-eyed. So, I mean, there's no label on what you have to look like to be a Métis person. There's nothing... Like, I don't think that there's any criteria... well obviously there is. Not everybody can say, "I'm Métis," but I don't think you can say like someone's not Métis because of their color. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 4; p. 10)

For Lawrence Mercredi,

The Métis people of North America are the true Indigenous peoples of this land. The Europeans came over from the east [the cardinal direction], and the Dene came over from the East [geopolitical reference to "the orient"]. And they met. They're still newcomers to this land too. And they created Métis. Indigenous. Okay? So what Métis means to me is that I am, I have rights that the non-Aboriginal community does not have. I can hunt whenever I want, however much I want, wherever I want. And I've always believed that. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 3)

George Mandeville describes what it means to him to be Métis.

Well we're able to switch between the traditional lifestyle which would be like the way the natives learned and also incorporate some of the influence of the fur traders, or whatever, the white influence, you know? And mix the both and just switch from one side to the other whenever and, just be comfortable. (George Mandeville transcript, p. 2)

Though she does not speak Métis-French, Stefany Bulmer is passionate about the language and interested in its future. Here is how she feels about the language in respect to her identity.

I feel kind of bad that I never absorbed Michif, but I absorbed the Tłıchǫ, I'm like, "How does that happen?" I can actually understand it. I have spent 13 years with [my partner who is a Tłıchǫ speaker]. I hear it a lot. But I just felt, like, I really wish I would've known Michif better. And I don't want our youth to lose it either. Like, I don't. I don't want it to be gone. It's a huge part of Métis culture. And it is a Métis language, there is no other language like it. So, once it's gone, it's gone. There will be videotapes and stuff, but that's it. [...] Michif is important because it's a unique language, and it's unique to the Métis people. It's a very interesting one. It's mixed, right. And it's just a part of our culture. For me I just feel like it's an identity. I don't think Michif gets enough recognition for what it is. Because it's not registered as one of the "11 official languages" [hand quotes]. It's still an Aboriginal language that is spoken by distinct Métis people. And I think all languages are important to everybody, because that's everybody's way of communicating, everybody's culture. But Michif does not have any status. [...] It's sad. Because a lot happened to Aboriginal people, or well, Indigenous people. All people of the north. The Métis people had to fight hard to be recognized, and Bill<sup>44</sup> fought hard for that. We are recognized. But our language is not recognized. We are recognized as Métis people, but not our language. But that should come hand-in-hand. If we are recognized as Métis under the bill, so is our language. That is unique to our diverse group. You're always going to find people that are like, "It's a waste of money, just speak English, you know English already." So, I just feel like there's a lot of taboo around it, people don't know much about it. And they don't know that it's dying. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 23; p. 27; p. 28)

Similarly, Lee Mandeville describes how it feels to be a young Métis person who has not had exposure to the language.

Lee: It is obviously bothering people who weren't raised on it, like me, or Stefany, it bothers us to see that something of ours can be eradicated. I think it would be healthy for us if we can maybe hear somebody speaking it or whatever, it gives us a good sense of identity, I think it is important. If they can fund someone in jail, they can give us some money to run a class to learn snippets of the language at least. George: It might not have been said openly, but we are basically told that it's not important. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 15)

While Leoni Lafferty and her daughter Cheryl Gargon are proud of their Métis identity, they told us of some of the difficulties facing the community in terms of being recognised.

Leoni: It's like [Michif] is just left out. Cheryl: We haven't been recognized enough. And I am a director of the Métis organization, so it's like I'm trying and trying, even I try to incorporate being Métis, wearing the sash, the books, and trying to get that going. Maybe we can have little blurbs of where we came from and our history, you know just to get it out there. I think it would be important for us to stop being left out, just pushed on the side all the time. Because I have a really strong heritage and being Métis. I am proud to be Métis. [...] Even if I try to have a conversation with my mom anywhere public, people would think that we are talking about them. I had a hard time growing up being a Métis. I had to fight through to make a point, I had to fight physically. Yeah. They called me white man it was rough. (Leoni Lafferty and Cheryl Gargon transcript, p. 5; p. 6)

Kurtis Bulmer reflects on the relationship between language and his family.

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<sup>44</sup> Bill Enge, President, North Slave Métis Alliance

Yes it's great that they have their own unique tongue. It's too bad not many more people speak it, I know a few of them I hear when you come visit my grandma you notice it, when people come over. I know not too many people have learned it, so it is not being used that much, in the Deh Cho you think of Fort Simpson mainly, and the Métis there come from and you don't really hear the language there. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 4)

Métis elder Edward Jones speaks Chipewyan, but not Michif. He does not consider the language to be linked to his identity.

Well, Michif is not important to me personally. It's not going to help me. Susan: Is Michif as important as English? [...] Or the other Aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories? Edward: I think English is more important. English is the universal language, right? What did they try to make a universal language out of, was it Esperanto? It didn't work, so they stuck with English. (Edward Jones transcript, p. 34)

He describes who Métis people are.

You know the federal government and the territorial government, I don't think that they fully understand that Métis are not white, and they're not [...] the native, the full-blooded native. That we have our own culture, because we do things differently from the whites, and from the natives. We have our own culture. And the government, I think, should understand that. But to me they don't seem to understand that. At one point they're even saying we're not Aboriginal. (Edward Jones transcript, p. 41)

Sonia Minoza also does not link language to her identity, but she does think that you should be able to choose what language you take in school<sup>45</sup>.

I don't think there is there a language element to being Métis, because the language isn't spoken around me, and I am not often around it, or those who do speak it. [...] I think that you should have the option of what language you want to take [in school]. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 1; p. 2)

Evelyn D'Hont draws a distinction between Métis history as a whole, and her personal history. She told us that the night before I called to schedule an interview, she had dreamt that she was being spoken to in Métis-French and she understood. She reflects on not knowing Michif.

Michif is part of the Métis history, but I can't really say it is part of my history. But it's definitely part of the Métis history for sure. [...] I think I really want people to learn their language because I wasn't taught it, and it just burns me up. Oh, not really burns me up. I wish I knew another language. [...] And it would've been so easy to learn it at home. (Evelyn D'Hont transcript, p. 18; p. 19)

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<sup>45</sup> At the time of the interviews, the school in Fort Providence incorporated Slavey into its curriculum, but not French or Métis-French.



Stefany Bulmer has had similar experiences to Evelyn,

Well, when I dream, a couple times, I've heard my mom speak [in the Northern Métis language], and I felt like I spoke back to her, and we were talking, but it's never happened. Maybe because I've wished for it. Because I feel like it's a disconnect between myself and my grandma, and my mom, and my aunties. I feel a disconnect in the language barrier. It is saddening that we lost something so important. (Stefany Bulmer, p. 19)

Edward Mercredi believes that language and culture go hand in hand.

Language and culture are connected, very much so, especially for the Métis people. The Métis people are not white and they are not Aboriginal. So we are very, very unique as a person. They are comfortable in both societies, and yet, we don't really consider ourselves different. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 7)

Louis Constant mentioned that beyond the language, other community activities were influenced by Métis culture.

See most of our cultural stuff like jigging, square dancing was introduced to the community by the Métis. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 5)

While talking to Louis, his wife, Evelyn Constant and Stefany Bulmer began discussing what it feels like when they can't speak the language of their ancestors.

Stefany: It's almost a gap missing from you when you don't have your own language. I feel helpless, kind of, sometimes I feel sad that with my Grandma, I can't really converse with her. Evelyn: I know, that is how I feel too. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 16)

Lee Mandeville highlights the long standing tradition of Métis being adept at languages, and in the past being employed as translators, as discussed in §2.1.1.

Susan: Do you want to say more about your family's languages? Lee: I know that they were interpreters for like Treaty 8, my great uncle Mandeville, he used to interpret. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 6)

Lee continued on and told us how it makes him feel that there is so little awareness or recognition of Michif.

I don't think it is fair that they have all the other languages except for ours, I don't think it's fair. [...] They can have French as an official language, but not Michif? There are more people here that are not just French, they are Métis, there are thousands of us, I think it is, it's not really that hard to recognize it, somebody should get it started. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 13)

George Mandeville describes why Michif is important to him, and to Métis people.

[Michif is important because] it is something that my mom spoke, you know, I know it is part of my heritage. Because that is the language that my mom used, my dad [used], but I guess we were forced

to learn English, or proper French. So we were told that basically just put everything away, it is not necessary, you learn *this* [variety of French, or English] and that's it. [...] When you are in residential school, you do as they tell you. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 15)

Sonia Minoza predicted that Michif would be gone in 20 years. I asked her how she would feel if this was the case.

I don't know... because if you lose the language, you lose part of your identity. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 6)

Edward Mercredi reminds us of a part of Métis identity that will be lost if the language is lost.

Michif is a very, very humorous language. You know, if you say something in Michif, you sound very, very funny, that is why we as Métis have a different sense of humor. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 8)

## 5.4 Movement and Migration

The theme of migration ran through many people's stories who were interviewed. People talked about moving for work, or moving for school. They told stories of the trading days when Métis moved around for a living. They talked about how movement affected their family's language practices.

Tony Whitford talked about early Métis traders migrating to trade in the North.

Like a lot of the Métis stuff traces back to the days of trading, and these big canoes are loaded with trade goods that would come from the east, and it would come west, into the north, and they would be trading guns, axes, knives, powder, cloth, needles, knives, pots, pans, stuff like that had metal that the people didn't have here, because the metal age didn't reach us until it came in as an implement already. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 13).

Similarly, George Mandeville recounts how his ancestors arrive in the north with the fur trade, and through his story, you can begin to see the threads of migration.

Well they [my ancestors or "The First Mandevilles"] were couriers du bois, I suppose, voyageurs. They came up with the fur trade, and once they got here they didn't want to go back. Like, I think that he originated in Normandy somewhere, came up through Montréal but continued on. I think some of the Mandevilles went around toward New Orleans, and Jamaica, there is a 'Mandeville Louisiana', this is all one family. I think one of the brothers went to New Orleans, and there is a place called

Mandeville in New Orleans. But the other one came up here and he remained here. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 3)

Edward Mercredi also spoke about where Métis people came from, and where Métis people travelled, the language travelled too.

You see, they spoke it with the Catholic Church, the priests and nuns were all French, so it was the language that they brought with them from Quebec. And along the whole fur trade route, which goes back quite a few hundred years, like if you went back to Manitoba, the older generations, you would find that they still speak it. Those who are older than me would speak it, and maybe some my age would still speak it. And the same thing in Saskatchewan. Buffalo Narrows. There would still be Métis families who still speak it because that is the old fur trade route, and that is where the Métis came from. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 2)

People also were forced to move to attend residential school, which impacted their language practices.

For me, French stopped being spoken, I'm thinking, because in that time when we were all spread... we went to Akaitcho hall, some of us went to Akaitcho hall. That's where we lost our language. (Evelyn Constant transcript, p. 3)

Everybody comes back from the hostels and missions and like that, and we lost our mother tongue, and we have to learn it all over again. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 11)

Well, I have some trouble with some of the words, having not lived in Fort Providence for over 30 years, but we do speak it when I get there. They speak it amongst themselves all the time, but I visit. ... In 1964 we attended the hostels, which are now referred to as residential schools, in Fort Simpson and in Yellowknife, and I remained in Yellowknife, now since I was about 19 years old. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 7)

At the time of residential schools, families also moved to new locations to prevent their children from attending residential schools. This can be seen from the perspective of three generations of the Mercredi family, beginning with Elder Margret "Peggy" Mercredi:

Yeah. We're two years in Snowdrift. Grandpa [my husband] quit the Bay because they wouldn't transfer him to a smaller community where there was a school for the kids to go to. They wanted him to stay there another two years in Snowdrift, but he said, "No, I want kids just to go to school..." But they said, "Well, we'll take your kids to the convent in Chip [Fort Chipewyan]." And then grandpa said, "No. My kids don't go to the convent." He says, "I quit." (Margaret Mercredi transcripts, p. 5)

Peggy's son, Lawrence Mercredi remembers this happening as a young child.

My father worked in the Hudson Bay as well, and when he left Fort Chip, he left because of residential school, eh? He didn't want us to go there. So he uprooted us and we moved here to Yellowknife, and he worked in the mine, Giant Mine. And my mom was the- housewife. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 6)

Finally, Ryan Mercredi, Peggy's grandson, tells his family's story:

I think about what brought my grandparents to bring their family from Łutselk'e to Yellowknife, and that involved a lot of Hudson's Bay Company [pause] policies around educating their employees' children in residential schools. And my grandparents did not want my uncles, my father for that matter, educated at residential school, so my grandfather quit the Hudson's Bay Company outright when my uncles were ready to go to school, and he moved to Yellowknife so that he could be in more control of their education. (Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 3)

Others moved for work. Tony Whitford tells us how he ended up in Yellowknife.

... That's how I got to Akaitcho. I was working on a tugboat, and one day this gentleman appears at the dock and says to me, "You're Tony? I'm looking for you," he said. "Okay," I said. I knew he was a government man because he had a government car, and then he said, "Talking to your mom, and she tells me you want to be a mechanic." I said, "Yeah, you know, I would like to be a mechanic." "Well," he said, "I've got some good news for you." He said, "I'm with the government, and we just built a school in Yellowknife, trade school, and I want you to go there," he says. "Oh, thank you. But I've got no place to live." "Don't worry about that," he said, "there's a residence there too. I've signed you up already." "Oh, well that's really good." (Tony Whitford transcripts, p. 7)

Evelyn D'Hont explains that she settled in Yellowknife because that is where the work is.

Oh, I moved here in 1988. I never lived in Fort Providence, I was born in Fort Resolution, then we moved to Uranium City which no longer exists—well 70 people. And then Fort Smith, and then I came here. So minus the years at school, at university, yep. Came where the work is. (Evelyn D'Hont transcript, p. 7)

Many people I interviewed explained how movement and migration affected their language practices, and their families language practices.

If I were to go to Ft. Providence, I would be speaking it again in a few days too. [...] But here in Yellowknife I have no one to speak it with. If I see a cousin of mine I speak it. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 3-4)

...my two older brothers are also my half-brothers, and that's why they got the language too as well, because they stayed in Providence a lot, and nobody spoke English, so you either had to learn it, or you don't know what's going on. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p.4)

[In Yellowknife it is] all English. Like I said, we moved to Yellowknife fairly early, and that was it for any kind of language learning. You know, you get your basic French in grades 7, 8, and 9, that kind of thing, and that's about it. English is the language of the world. ... Yeah, well, you know, you go to a community that's 95% Aboriginal languages, then you have to learn the language to be able to trade with the people. And when you get out of that environment, then of course you lose that. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 6-7)

When [my sister] came back [from Alberta] she didn't talk Michif for the longest time, or just barely. It's just now that she's starting to speak it again to mom and everything a lot more. It all came back to her, I'm sure. But she was gone so long, hey, so English was becoming the easier language for her, I guess. (James Christie transcript, p. 4)

Michif is all that we spoke around town, and it took me a really long time before I could talk good enough English after I left Fort Providence because that's all that we spoke at home was straight French. Very little Slavey, even then I am just picking it up now. The Slavey language I couldn't even talk before, but now I'm starting to pick it up. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 2)

I know when I was born in Providence, and I grew up there, and I know my grandma, and my great-grandma, my great-uncles, they all spoke Michif there. And I learned it, but I only did a bit of schooling there for a few years, and then I moved to Yellowknife, and I lost it. So, but I've also heard French also spoken, it's not mixed like there, but that helped me get through school. That subject was very easy. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 1)

## 5.5 Language shift

Language shift takes place when, over time, one language is replaced by another. This can often be seen in intergenerational differences in language practices within a country, region, community, or even at a family level. Many people who were interviewed spoke of changes in language practices in their families. It was striking to hear the stories of parents, grandparents, and great grandparents who spoke four, five, six languages. Younger participants who were interviewed are almost exclusively monolingual, while those who were a bit older were either monolingual or bilingual. Gone are the days of knowing a multitude of languages. Métis-French is one of many languages in Canada undergoing this process.

While this shift was heard in many interviews, Elder, and great storyteller, Tony Whitford gave us an idea of language shift through the perspective of his family's language practices. Let's first begin with his grandparents.

They [my grandparents] knew those four languages: Chipewyan and Cree, and then French and English. And both, my grandmother did the same thing, she knew both of them. There's a little bit of difference between Cree and Chipewyan. One's a little smoother. Cree, Cree is a bit more harsh. Chipewyan is a little bit smoother. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 14)

His mom knew two of the four languages his grandparents knew.

[My mom] knew French and English, and she didn't know any of the Aboriginal languages. Yep, she might've said a few words in Chipewyan, you know but not very much. So, I never got any from her, I never got language from her. [...] My mom spoke to me in English primarily. And she spoke to me in French, secondary. And then I, when I spoke French, I would hang around at the priest's house there with the bishop and the priests and the brothers. So I spoke a lot of French with the brothers, and with the priests there. (Tony Whitford transcripts, p. 16; p. 17)

Within his own siblings one can see the effects of language shift. As the eldest sibling, Tony has the best grasp of French and English.

Most of it, like I said, was English, but sometimes she [my mom] would say things in French that she didn't want anybody else to understand. The other kids. You know? And she'd still did that, she did that until she died, you know? She'd speak a little bit of French there because nobody else would understand, hopefully. And that was the only time. But it wasn't bad, it was just that she'd switch from one to the other. [...] English was predominant. And the same with my grandmother too. But she'd also speak French. Depending on what you got started on. If she started speaking French, she'd keep on speaking French. And then I would understand enough and I would converse with her, but, if my other brothers came in and it would just switch right away to English. Because my younger brother could speak a little bit of French, less than me, but [my two youngest brothers] didn't, you know? (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 18)

Though he lived with his grandparents, Tony did not speak Cree or Chipewyan fluently. Tony explains why.

So I lived with my grandparents. When I lived with them, I learned to speak more French than I did in the school, at Resolution. The reason I spoke French at school, in Resolution – but I also [spoke English], there was half-and-half in English [and French], because I learned to write in English, and then I learned to communicate in French, so I had both. And then when I got home, my grandfather told me, and it's very clear, that he didn't think that I should learn to speak too much Cree and Chipewyan. He said, "Learn English, because English will take you anywhere. You can work in the white man's world with English. It's very difficult to do it if you speak Cree. You can work in the trap line and stuff like that among your peers. But you can't go to work anywhere else, you know. You can't go and join the government. You can't even go to become a priest if you speak only Cree." So, in those days, it was important to know that if you were going to be in the clergy or not, too. So, I lived with [my grandparents] for that length of time. They influenced me greatly. Again, independence, hard work, punctuality, thrift, and certainly the independence thing. I always looked after myself. Helping hand? First place you look, end of your arm, you know? And then, again, learning the language, they spoke French, and they spoke Cree, and as I said there earlier on, well, I picked up parts of that too. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 7)

Tony finally describes the family language practices of his three grown sons.

Three sons. And none of them speak anything else, except boy number two took French immersion. And my grandson, from the first son, he speaks Tagalog because his mom is Pilipino. And then her parents who look after the kid a lot speak Tagalog. And then my second daughter in law, she's Chinese, first-generation. She was born in Canada, but her parents were born in China. And she speaks Mandarin, but none of the children do. And then we never had anything out of it so. And then son number three is [married to an] English-speaking [woman] there from Manitoba, a little bit of Icelandic, but I don't think they have any language influence there though. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 26-27)

Similarly, Roberta Bulmer describes the intergenerational differences in language practices in her family.

Well, in our household we only spoke Michif, but at school we spoke English. To get it straight, I'll go into the, you know... My mom lived with my dad up until I was five years old, and then I went for TB hospital in Vancouver, so when I came back I learned the Michif language. And so when we went

to live with my grandparents, we just spoke Michif, and at school we learned English, but when Dene people came to the house, my grandparents, my uncles, my grandmother all spoke Slavey to them. Amongst ourselves was Michif, or amongst other Métis people was Michif. If the nuns or priests came around my grandparents and my grandmother speak French to them, because they knew the Parisian French. When other government people came around they spoke English, or my grandfather was also an interpreter for English, French, and Michif, and Slavey. So, lots of languages there, both of my uncles spoke Slavey, English, and Michif. My mother and my uncles they all understood English, but no one spoke English in the house. And they referred to other people as “les blancs” meaning ‘the whites’, which normally meant government people, and people like the RCMP, or nurses, or doctors, or those kind of people. So that’s how they refer to people from outside the community. So when they came around we didn’t speak the language Michif. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 4)

She goes on to explain,

Well, I never bothered with Michif, because, like I say, the schools were teaching English and French, and that’s what the working world is in, so, and there was no more communities, like there was before. I didn’t plan to go back to Providence, and even if I did, I don’t think anybody’s left, except my mom and a couple of older relatives. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 11)

Finally, Roberta’s daughter, Stefany Bulmer, describes her current family language practices.

Well my son and [my partner], they’re fluent [in Tłıchǫ]. [My son] is only nine, and he’s my translator. Like, I can understand, but if it gets a little bit... again, more in depth, if it’s bigger, then I’m like... and I have to watch for the verbs, and stuff like that. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 16-17)

Lawrence Mercredi remembers the languages his grandparents spoke, noting that they spoke Michif with one another, and English with him.

[My Grandparents] spoke Michif. They spoke French. They spoke English. They spoke Chipewyan. They spoke Cree, or parts... Cree, I think. [...] He worked for the Bay, and so when he’s trading then he’s got to be able to speak the language of the traders. [...] Well, you know, when I did visit them [grandparents]. Last time it was ‘63, or something like that. They were both still alive then. Yeah, they chatted like that all the time in Michif and French. They would speak to us in English. Yeah. I would like to have learned that, you know. I mean, it’s always nice to know another language. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 4, p. 5)

Language shift between generations can be seen in Evelyn D’Hont’s family’s language practices as well.

Well, my grandfather spoke, I think four or five languages, and his wife died when my mom was 6, so I’m not sure what languages she spoke. But she came from Fort Resolution, so maybe Chip, and whatever else. [...] English, French, North and South Slavey, and maybe Chip or Cree or something. He was a translator at the treaties, Treaty 11, because he knew all these languages. There was so much trading and all that, it’s not like today where... Yeah. I wish my parents would’ve taught us French. It’s like, “Grrrr!” But back then the idea was [that] it was harder for you at school if you knew two languages, so they only taught us English. But in reality it makes you smarter knowing two languages. (Evelyn D’Hont transcript, p. 3)

George Mandeville can see evidence of language shift in his family, and even among his siblings.

That's right, both my parents spoke probably about three or four languages [there was English, French or Michif, Slavey, Chipewyan]. But the Michif language was what we spoke at home. Like my older brothers and sister speak it fluently, it seems like, well out of 17 in the family, about halfway down we started going to school, and we just switched off Michif. We switched it off and took on the English language that is what we always spoke after that. All of the family spoke Michif, and it seemed like Fort Resolution was predominantly a Métis community. So everyone spoke French, or Michif. [...]

Susan: Can you see a difference within you siblings' languages? George: I suppose. Bernice, she's the youngest, I don't think she speaks Michif has at all. And my older brother, he is 80 now, and he speaks it quite fluently. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 1; p. 3)

Elder Gilbert Bouvier describes the situation in Fort Providence.

[Growing up we spoke] straight French. Yes. We were taught in the school, but that was just a little bit of English. Not too much. At home everybody spoke French. Everybody that I knew, that I could remember, everybody spoke French, even the native people, like Bonnetrouge... [...] Hardly anybody to talk English to except the RCMP, and the Bay manager, I guess, in those days. Yeah, the Hudson's Bay and the RCMP here, and then after the war was over and during the war in 1945 when the Army was here, they have them at the airport, there was big army camp there. They moved out in 1945 after the war was over. And I guess that they spoke English when they came to town to visit on weekends. The ones that spoke English. [...] [But now,] a lot of people hardly don't speak it anymore (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 1; p. 3)

While Gilbert learned Michif from his parents, the situation was different by the time he had his own children.

Yeah. Because my mom, she would've taught us. But back then, [when I had kids] they were just saying, no, no, no, don't teach them the language. [...] At home I speak a little bit of French to my daughters [in 40s] and they understand now, but I should have started way back like five or six years ago, I should've started talking French at them. (Gilbert Bouvier transcript, p. 5)

In talking to the younger participants, the realities of language shift become evident as you hear stories of their language practices in comparison to their parents language practices.

While the younger generation in Fort Providence are not learning Métis-French as prevalently as in the past, they have a better understanding of the Slavey language, as it is being taught in the headstart program and in the school. Here is an excerpt of our conversation with Sonia Minoza.

Sonia: My mom's side is Slavey, on my father's side it's Michif, and for his parents, it would be the same. Susan: So did you grow up hearing Michif a lot? Sonia: No, not so much, only when I was over at my grandmothers. [...] Besides English, my dad spoke Michif, and my mom speaks very little Slavey. [...] All of my siblings speak only English. [...] I mean we can probably understand a few words, like the basics of Slavey, just because it was taught in our schools. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 1-2)

Connie Bartlett and Violet Lafferty-Bonnetrouge both learned Slavey in school, and now have young children who also access Slavey in the school.



Evelyn: We don't hardly hear that language around town, French. It's mostly English and Slavey. [...]  
 Connie: If there was somebody there to teach it to the younger generation then people would know about it. [...] I'd probably want my son to learn Michif. [...] It's part of Providence. (Evelyn Constant and Connie Bartlett transcript, p. 2-3; p. 4)

My kids speak English and Slavey. [...] Well, my daughter asked me that [why there is no Métis-French in school] one time because she would want to try to at least speak it, the French language, and they don't teach it in school here. And she asked "why don't they do French classes?" And I had to say "I don't know. Because it's only Slavey." (Violet Lafferty-Bonnetrouge transcript, p. 3; p. 4)

Violet: Michif is important because it's its own language. Mostly all my relatives know it, but like me, I can't even speak it. Susan: When you went to school here, did they teach Slavey in school, was there a Slavey program? Violet: Yes. Susan: How much did you learn from that? Violet: A lot of reading and writing. Susan: Did you become "fluent"? Violet: Oh yeah, when people are in the store when I'm working they will be speaking Slavey, and I am like "Okay, I know what you're saying." (Violet Lafferty-Bonnetrouge transcript, p. 3; p. 8)

In Yellowknife, Lee Mandeville had exposure to French class.

Susan: So, what about with your siblings, what languages did you hear growing up and what languages did you guys speak? Lee: So we spoke English, I spent 11 years in school in French, and I think I learned one sentence. [Laughs.] But I can go to Québec and kind of catch on, order from a restaurant or something. Susan: Were you in immersion, or was that French class? Lee: Just French class, but I heard it at home, when I would go to Fort Resolution, I would go spend summers with my grandparents, I heard them speaking Chipewyan, my grandpa would tell stories and he would switch from French to Chipewyan to English. George: He would start off in Chip, and then have a little bit of French, all in one sentence, Chipewyan, French, Slavey, whatever. Lee: but we can catch on if it's mixed. So I could say that I heard the languages, conversed a little bit, I would say. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 5-6)

Lee and George describe the languages they hear now in Yellowknife and conclude,

Lee: It is all English. George: I know that they are trying to revive the Dogrib, the Chipewyan. Lee: [Michif]'s not an official language, eh, it's not recognized anywhere, so there is no mandate. George: It's on its way out. Susan: So now, do you ever hear Michif being spoken? George: No, not even amongst ourselves. Lee: I hear them joking around with it! They are joking around with it, conversing with each other. George: Probably the swearwords will live on forever! Susan: How many people do you think in the Northwest Territories speak Michif today? Lee: A handful. George: Very, very few, I tell you because, well, I am 68 now, and anybody younger than me does not speak it, so how many people are left over the age of 70? (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 9-10)

## 5.6 Prognosis for the Northern Métis language

*In 20 years they'll say "What's Michif?"*

*Edward Jones transcript, p. 33*

Participants candidly shared what they thought would become of the Michif language and how that would make them feel. Understanding that language shift is taking place, this section looks at the future of Métis-French from the perspective of the Métis community.

In speaking with Edward Mercredi, the threads of Métis language and culture “dying” continually arose.

I have relatives in Fort Simpson that still spoke it all the time. It was kind of a dying thing and I think that my generation is the last true Métis who spoke it. I don't speak it anymore myself, very, very little. If I run in to relatives and that, I do. [...] Both sides of my family were all old-time Métis, they would have all spoken Michif. [...] [The younger generation] should know about [Michif], but then again, the last true Métis, they are getting sparse. Like, the ones that consider themselves Métis, the ones that still speak the language and retain some of the old time culture. With so called “progress” it is all dying. I am glad to see you are interested. [...] Like 50 or 60 years ago, all the older families would speak Michif. But with that generation passed on, it's a dying thing, it's very clear for my generation and my cousins and that. Susan: Yes, in Yellowknife I am not sure if there are too many young people who speak it. Edward: Yes, not at all. The ones who do speak it are mostly in their 40s and 50s, 60s. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 2; p. 6; p. 9, p 10)

Ryan Mercredi estimated the number of Michif speakers, and let us know what he thinks about the future of Michif.

In North America? Maybe a few hundred [speak Michif], if that. And they're all pretty old. In Canada; even fewer, in the hundreds. Maybe... In the Northwest Territories; I dunno, maybe a few dozen? (p. 37)

Stefany Bulmer explains the situation from her perspective.

Since I was a kid, I think [Michif] was just kind of left, and now, it's at a very dangerous part right now. There's no promotion of it. There's no encouragement of it. There's encouragement, they offer Tłıchʔ classes, but they don't offer Michif classes. Because it's not recognized. But it is a Métis language, and I feel that it should be recognized, because it's unique to the Métis people. I don't think it gets enough credit. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 24)

Lawrence Mercredi gives his insights.

Well, I guess if nothing really happens, and I'm thinking, it seems to me I remember that there is something happening in Manitoba someplace about Michif, resurrecting it as a language, and things like that. And I think probably that if there wasn't anything like that it would be dead in that length of time. But if people are willing and wanting to learn it without it being crammed down their throats, then it would be a language that will barely survive. As you know, English is the world's language and, I don't know, I think I've read some estimates that all the languages of the world will be dead in 30 or 40 years, maybe not even that long, and English will be the language. So if you have a handful of people that are speaking Michif right now, to translate that into numbers in 10 years, I couldn't even imagine. I couldn't even guess to see if there would be any kind of interest to do that. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 14)

I asked people to estimate the fluency of Michif speakers from different age groups. Here are some of the responses.

Well, right now just mostly the elderly people speak French. [...] If it is not introduced back to the younger generation, it will just gradually die off. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 4-5)

Susan: I want to learn about different age groups, and also how well these different age groups understand Michif; so between zero and 20, how well would this age group, or people in this age range understand Michif, in your estimation. Sonia: In my estimation I think I would say no one that I know of. Susan: What about between 20 to 40 [years]. Sonia: 20 to 40, they may. I'm not quite sure if I'm right about this, but I think I know two who may possibly speak it, some of it with their grandmothers. [...] Susan: And between 40 and 60, how well does that age group understand Michif? Of the Métis community. Sonia: I would say almost all the older people who I know can speak it. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 5)

Susan: And if you were to estimate, how many people you think speak the northern Métis/Michif dialect. Kurtis: It's going down quite a bit because the older that they get, elders die, so, I'm not really exact on the numbers there, but with my family spread out it would be Simpson, [Fort] Res[olution], Yellowknife, and some down south, not too correct on the number there. Susan: between the ages of 0 to 20, how well with that age group understand Michif, if at all? Kurtis: I'm not sure, maybe a few that are mostly around my family that are speaking it would know, but with that age I'm not sure. Susan: What about 20 to 40, do you think that there are people in that age group who understand Michif? Kurtis: Yeah, I'm pretty sure there's a few, for sure. Susan: And the ages 40 to 60? Kurtis: A bit more probably, my uncles' and aunts', and my mother's age is there. Susan: Right. And then people who are over 60, how well would they understand Michif? Kurtis: Pretty good. Susan: They would be the most fluent speakers? Kurtis: That's the language that they use before any other. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 5)

The answers to "If nothing happens, how do you imagine Michif in 20 years?" varied from participant to participant, but in general, the prognosis was that it would be lost.

Probably dead. Cheryl Gargon transcript, p. 10)

It won't be around, it will probably be dead, gone. (Violet Lafferty-Bonnetrouge transcript, p. 6)

Connie: Probably be lost. Evelyn: Yeah probably lost. (Evelyn Constant and Connie Bartlett transcript, p. 8)

I think in 20 years from now it would be gone. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 6)

Oh it would be gone. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 7)

Yeah, I think it'll be extinct. Or pretty much extinct. (Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 38)

Okay, if nothing's done, I see it gone. And the only people that will be speaking it will be my mom, and my sister, and the few people that are still in Providence. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 26)

George: It's gone. It's gone. Lee: It's gone for sure. All it takes is one person in a community to start something, you know, all across the world people have lost their languages, but there is always that one person who understands it and speaks it, next thing you know half the community is speaking it, and then people were proud again, you know, and then maybe people would start square dancing again, or fiddling again. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 12)

Maybe in Northern Saskatchewan, and Northern Manitoba [people would still speak it]. And maybe up here, like a lot of it is retained in the smaller places. Like it is fairly widely spoken in Fort Smith. The majority of people are Métis, probably the largest Métis community in the North. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 7)

In 20 years they'll say, "What's Michif?" (Edward Jones transcript, p. 33)

Living in Fort Providence, Evelyn and Connie also provided some insight into the future of Slavey.

Evelyn: Slavey will continue I guess, because they're teaching it... Connie: ...in the Aboriginal Headstart program and in the elementary. (Evelyn Constant and Connie Bartlett transcript, p. 9)

I continued on to ask people how it would feel if their forecast of the prognosis of their language were to come true in 20 years. Here are some of their responses.

Oh well I would be pretty sad actually, because for me it's been in my family forever, and just to see something like that lost, and they mentioned over 20 years ago there, talking about dying languages, and they brought it up in the Yukon because they didn't do much, and I used to live in Dawson city quite a bit and I didn't hear them speak their tongue, or their language, or anything, and now they're more into it, you don't want to lose anything with your culture and heritage, you want it preserved. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 7)

Lee: Kind of sad. George: It's almost too late right now. Lee: You can't just write it off like that... George: No, no, I'm not writing at off, I'm just saying that it's almost too late right now for anybody around to even carry on a full conversation. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 13-14)

I followed up by asking people how they would like to see Michif in 20 years.

Well I hope I'd be speaking with my family, you know, there would be people who may be interested in learning it because it's a different language, and you could mix a bunch of French people, they would know what it was, because of the French that is mixed in. [...] Well, I hope it doesn't die out, I hope we can begin the process where we can get our tongue back and manage to learn it. That would be nice because I know it's its own language. (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 7)

I would like to see it brought up, and future young generations of children being able to speak it. [Michif is important to me because] It's a part of who we are [...] I think that language is important to every specific culture. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 6-7)

## 5.7 Language Revitalization efforts, what comes next?

After talking with participants about Michif we landed upon the question “What next?” In this section, we look at participant’s insights on how to go forward with language revitalization efforts, or if we should go forward.

Elders Edward Mercredi and Edward Jones are not sure if there is any future for Michif in the NWT.

I don’t know if we can do anything, like I said it is a dying language probably my generation is the last one to speak it. [...] I think as soon as the convents and that were done with, the language wasn’t spoken that much anymore; the French language. (Edward Mercredi transcript, p. 9)

Well, I don’t know what good it would do to learn Michif, that’s the thing. Would it be useful the future? I don’t think so. I think it’s a dying language. It’s almost dead now. (Edward Jones transcript, p. 33)

Tony Whitford shares his thoughts about language revitalization.

I don’t know much about language revitalization. I know people long to go back to the old ways, when language was important. And that there was old ways of saying things, and doing things. And you could communicate the old way, but again. I see no reason why—my own opinion—why language fails is because people let it fail. If, I don’t know what ethnic background you come from, but suppose it’s Icelandic. I can’t teach you Icelandic, and I shouldn’t have to teach you Icelandic in the school. Your mom and your dad, and your uncles, your aunts, your grandparents, should influence that. [...] You, Aboriginal. I don’t know what background you come from, but if you speak Cree, Chipewyan, schools don’t have to teach you that. Your parents should teach you it, if it’s important. What ends up happening, like me, it isn’t a part of my life any more. I can’t work in Chipewyan and Cree, I don’t speak it enough to anybody, so it just goes by the wayside. None of my kids even know one word in it. It never was something. So, revitalization, all of a sudden, I get really nostalgic. “Oh, I’ve got to speak Cree now, and the white man came and took my language away, darn it, and I’ve gotta get it going again,” you know. So I go to the government and say, “You’ve got to put that in the school curriculum.” That’s wrong. I want to do it, I’m going to go and find a place to do it. The government had nothing to do with it, taking it away, it was a change that was coming when the south came to the north. It’s lost because people allowed it to get lost. You look at the Ukrainians. They still speak Ukrainian. You look at the Chinese, you look at the Somalis, now. You look at the Arabs that are coming here now. They all got their language; if it’s important enough, they’re going to keep on talking it. Speaking it. You see? But if all of a sudden Somali doesn’t work here anymore, you’re going to learn English, and they do. They’re working in the English language, pretty soon Somali becomes a little less, and a little less, and less. Unless the parents speak it at home. Kid comes home from school, they start speaking Ukrainian to them, and then they also speak English, of course, but that’s where the importance comes from. It resides in the family, and that’s their responsibility. Now to get it going again, yeah, you can speak it in the Legislative Assembly, but you also ask the government, say, “Can you help us do that? We want to get it back, revitalized. Can you help us do that?” And they say, “Yeah, yeah, we’ll put a program in the curriculum,” as an aside, but it shouldn’t be compulsory, mandatory. In Nunavut it is. [...] [To summarize,] yeah, the family’s the most important thing [for language revitalization]. And that’s where it gets lost too. You see, it’s hard for a person, a young person to continue speaking the language unless there’s somebody to speak it to and with. If your parents don’t find it important enough to carry on, then you’re not going to go anywhere

with it. The kid will soon drop it, you see. But if it's important, then the family will allow it to be part of their life, you know. (Tony Whitford transcript, p. 31-32)

Roberta Bulmer shares a similar philosophy on language revitalization.

Revitalization. Yeah, I heard about it because I know the Dene are doing it. And they're get paid for it, which I don't agree with. 'Cause you look at all the other cultures, like Asians, and Chinese, they all teach their kids that language, they go to school, they learn English and French, so... So that's the way I look at it. It's a family thing. (Roberta Bulmer transcript, p. 12)

Evelyn D'Hont also thinks action should be at a family level.

But I don't think you can really learn a language at school. [...] It has to be at home, and playground, whatever they call that... Yeah, and when you try and revitalize a language, so many words are lost, and expressions. It'll just never be the same after. Even the accent, trying to get it right. (Evelyn D'Hont transcript, p. 14; p. 15)

Kurtis Bulmer shares his thoughts on going forward.

Like I said, you want to preserve it, you don't want to lose a tongue and history, you know. People think "Oh geez, doesn't your family speak Michif", like all my friends know that, when they go to [Fort] Providence they recognize that language. And a few of our cousins there, they know it's a dying language and we are the ones who preserve it so. Keep it going its part of Canadian history, right? (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 8)

Kurtis shares his thoughts on how to accomplish this.

All you have to do is spread it around, teach it, it's a learning process, and if you want it alive, the language has been passed on to the kids, and others who are not passing away soon, because it's not living on in a soul who speaks it has to be living. So to keep the language and kids have to be speaking it. There is new life being born, like, Lisa has a kid, she will be speaking this language, and they pick up the language really quick actually. [For example] an afterschool program, pick up the kids and bring them to the North Slave Métis Alliance, hire one of my family members, because you're a researcher right? The anthropologists do that too, they pick up stuff and bring it to the Prince of Wales, and they do scientific research, there's books and museums up there, there's information. How else would you do it? (Kurtis Bulmer transcript, p. 9)

Stefany Bulmer would like to see it continue into the future.

I'd like to see it promoted more; recognized, accepted. It's not just a slang language that was made up and slapped together. It isn't that way. I want the kids, and the youth, and... See, it causes major disconnect, from grandparents to grandchildren, because they can no longer communicate with each other. They have to get third parties, like I do, [to translate]. And so people often think that because my grandma speaks Michif, that they need to yell it in English. But it's actually still not helping. I'm like "No, you don't need to raise [your voice]. She's still not going to get it. She's not a lip reader, she thinks you are yelling at her, and she doesn't know what's going on." So, I have to call my auntie, and ask, "Can you please tell grandma X, Y, Z." (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 26)

Stefany also speaks to the time-sensitive nature of language shift.

Just be very encouraging; encouraging [Métis] to try it out [(speaking Michif)]. It's a part of the culture, and their language, and having the second language is great, having your own cultural language, that was yours to begin with, to be able to get it back even better. Just really, just focusing

on how to get this going. And how to integrate it back so that this does not happen again. Learning from our past, and moving forward in a positive way with help from the government, or other bodies. ... Get the ball rolling, and it needs to start. Because the more we wait, the more... the elders are getting up there. They're in their 90s. They're gonna... Well there are still 40s and 30 year-olds, but I mean, once they're gone who, who'll pass that down, who'll teach that. There is no way of getting it. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 32)

Lawrence Mercredi shares his thoughts on where to go from here.

Well, I don't think nothing should be done, and I don't think laws should be created. I think if we had created some sort of awareness program about it, and perhaps got some feedback from there as to develop some sort of curriculum for the education system, and started at the really base level, kindergarten and up. But it's not one of the official languages, so you're going to have a really tough go on that one. [...] Well, I guess if it was important, it would be spoken a lot more. It doesn't seem like it is. In my life right now, it's not important. It's not important for me to speak French, or Chinese, or any other language. The interest, maybe, to have another language is different than actually doing it. You know what I mean? [...] You need to be able to make, create awareness at various levels of government where funding is necessary, eh? From there, there's a, it basically flows, you have to get the education people involved, but you need to start at the political level, [37m00s] you know, awareness there. At the same time, at the local level, as well, eh? Through whatever programs that you might put on, you know, there. [...] Well, if people are interested in wanting to learn it, I think that's all you need. And if there's some sort of structure that was being presented by the giver, then, obviously, on some sort of school curriculum type of program, then I would suspect that you could probably get some good interest in that. If it was presented properly, I'm thinking. Like, I don't know how they even introduce another language into the school system. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 13; p. 14; p.17; p. 18)

Louis Constant would like to see it re-introduced to the community.

Louis: It would be good if it was introduced again, in the community, and this way the people would get along like they used to, in the olden days, you know? [...] Like the square dances we used to have, we don't have that anymore. Susan: How come? Louis: Because it's mostly the Métis people that did the square dance, you know they used to do it lots. Susan: So, are there less Métis people here now? Or... Louis: Yeah there is. Especially in the elderly side. Susan: And how come there are less Métis people here? Louis: Because their language is dying out. There's a lot of younger generation coming up on the Métis side, but nobody speaks it anymore. (Louis Constant transcripts, p. 4)

Going forward, Cheryl Gargon would like to see classes offered to improve her language skills.

I would love to learn to speak it more. [...] I heard it was being taught in Manitoba, I would love to have something to do, like to even go forward, to go with. Even to learn how to write it out. That would be awesome. (Cheryl Gargon transcript, p. 10)

Violet Lafferty-Bonnetrouge also believes that if Métis-French is to continue, classes should be offered, and it should be in schools.

They should do classes. The younger generation should be learning the language, because once the older generation is gone then it won't be around. [...] Getting it in schools is most important. Have someone coming to teach the kids. Reading and writing would be good. (Violet Lafferty-Bonnetrouge transcript, p. 8; p. 6)

George and Lee Mandeville share their thoughts on how to go forward.

George: If it was going to be revived, I wouldn't mind taking some courses in it. Lee: I think it should be recognized. George: It should be revived, I think. Susan: Right, recognized and revived. Lee: First of all they should recognize it, and then work from there, at least try to revive it, it is obviously like, some people have a problem with it, passing on or whatever, so maybe it would be healthy for some people to revive some of their awareness of their heritage. [...] George: I remember we played in Fort Good Hope one time, and we played at the old folks home, like Lee's a fiddler, just before we left one of the old-timers made a comment in his language, and Mr. Kakawi, he interpreted it and he said, yeah that old-timer was saying that in the old days the boats would come and resupply the community, and there was always a fiddler on the boat, and that was our big show for the year, you know, and it was usually the Métis who provided the music. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 10-11)

More specifically, they thought it should be formally taught.

Lee: Kids should be learning it in school. George: All Métis should be learning it, maybe there should be an immersion thing too, who would be the teachers though? Because I wouldn't be able to teach. Lee: Well, hold on, they force the kids to learn Dogrib, you know, my sons aren't Dogrib, so something closer to Michif, so even if it's not the exact same language or dialect, it's closer to where they're from the first place, so they should have a choice to learn their own heritage first, then somebody else's. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 11-12)

George and Lee also looked to other communities efforts to revitalize other aboriginal languages as inspiration for Michif.

George: In Fort Res they hired a linguist to come in to revitalize the Chipewyan language, they wrote a book on it. [...] [S]he went in as the linguist and she selected eight or 10, up to 10 people, to sit in with her and they had these workshops. That might be good for Michif to do the same thing; it seemed to work. Lee: Why not? George: And after they got the interest rolling, now they are having courses in it. [...] There is funding available for that kind of thing. [...] Maybe we should look at reviving the language, and that would be one way to do it. (George and Lee Mandeville, p. 13)

Lee went on to discuss the role of education in language revitalization.

Lee: Just like anything, if you have it in schools then it's part of the curriculum, and families and parents are obligated and they have to nourish the language, they have to support their kids at home, and maybe they might want to get involved too. [...] It is also handy for, you know, kids are being educated a lot more, they are graduating, they are going to post-secondary and they could use it, it's a universal language even though it's not proper French, but it will help. But to justify it, you can say that instead of just "we want to learn our language, because it makes us feel good", you can say that it's useful because we can go to Montréal and converse with the locals there, and you know it's useful, we can use it as a second language. Speaking French is an asset that we are looking for, and you can say "well I speak Michif and it's a form of French", it's useful. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 16; p. 17-18)

George and Lee shared their final thoughts on going forward.

George: It will be nice to have it revived for sure, I would be interested in it. LM: It's good to see our generation working to maybe give the language a chance to get it revived. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 23)



## 5.8 Who plays a role?

In §5.7 we heard many participants express that going forward they believe the language should be revitalized. We heard that some people think that passing on language should be done in the family. We also heard suggestions that it could be done in schools. In this section, we hear about other agencies that could play a role in language revitalisation.

Ryan Mercredi shared his thoughts.

Communities have to be interested. Like, languages don't exist in social vacuums, like, you know. I mean it's not, languages are not like... Well, we all have our own idiolect, but languages are interactional and interactive things, like they really only come into existence in the company of other people, so I think it's important to have community. [...] I think have legal obligations to support languages revitalization. I think that case, that legal case anyway, is maybe a bit of a stretch, but I think that ultimately in a world where, yeah in the ideal political world, I think that there actually is a legal case. I think that the way judges are interpreting their fiduciary responsibility for Aboriginal people right now probably limits it, so it makes it maybe outside, or not completely in the realm of legal responsibility—but I think that a case could be made. [...] I think the researchers absolutely have a space in language revitalization. I think that language shift is a relatively natural process, but I think that the way it's occurring these days is sort of skewed from the natural process of language shift, and so I think that that has a whole host of factors, and so I think that communities really can't do it alone. I think that some professional... because I think that this sort of social situation that Indigenous communities are facing right now is sort of unprecedented. And so I think that traditional ways of approaching the problem are not sufficient—because if they were, then we wouldn't be dealing with this problem. (Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 41; p. 42)

Edward Jones notes that the government has played a role in the training of interpreters.

Well, the GNWT years ago—I'm talking about maybe about 30 years ago, 20 years ago—they had created a school for interpreters. And I wish they would've kept that up. They close it after a few years, I don't know why. Because, really, we don't have any qualified interpreters today. Although they say they're interpreters, but they're people that are just picked off the street, so to speak. So, there's a loss of communication between the natives and the whites. Because they're not getting the messages across, and a while ago they did a survey on that, because I brought it up at various meetings. And they learned that only 50% of what is said in English is conveyed to the native people, half is lost because of the interpreters not being qualified. (Edward Jones transcript, p. 36)

Stefany Bulmer mentions the role of different levels of governments; territorial, federal, and Aboriginal.

I think the government is involved in language revitalization. Indian and Northern Affairs should get involved, and set some money aside. I guess what would happen I think is, since, I don't know, North Slave Métis Alliance, maybe they could give them a grant to work on this, and to set up some of these programs, and do a trial, and see how goes. Like let's try for two years with a [language] camp, and integrate the language back into the children. At the same time, also, they can do their cultural hunting. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 29)

George and Lee Mandeville speak to the varying agencies who play a role.

George: I don't know if it is individuals, maybe organizations, like the Métis, like if you went to the Métis and said, and asked them how important do you think this is, maybe you'll get more interest. The government is where the funding comes from. Lee: Well, [the government] has a role, they're obligated to. If we ask them to do something then they're mandated to do it. Susan: And do you think that there's a role for linguists and researchers in language revitalization? George: Absolutely, that's what you need, you have a linguist come in because they know the format, how to plan. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 17)

Sonia Minoza points out the importance of those who speak the language.

I think that the people who can speak it should play an important role, if they have it, they could possibly be the last generation who is holding the language, and I think they play a very important role if they want to pass it down to the next generation. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 7)

## 5.9 Outcomes and deliverables

In this final section, I outline potential outcomes and deliverables that community members expressed they would like to see in the future.

Evelyn D'Hont and Ryan Mercredi both discussed the importance of documentation.

It would be nice to have it documented and recorded, and maybe even one of those dictionaries, and maybe one of those iPhone apps or something like the Tłıchǫ. I think there should be something done with it to preserve it, or... I don't know if it'll ever be revitalized, but might be. Definitely a record of it, so you can hear people speaking it, and something about the language. Just more information, I suppose. (Evelyn D'Hont transcript, p. 18)

I think we need to study it, and learn more about it, and ultimately document it, as much as possible, and sort of gain some community consensus about what to do about it really. Because I can't do it alone. (Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 39)

Ryan Mercredi also shared his thoughts on Michif programming in a realistic ideal world.

In a realistically ideal world, I think probably... probably children, maybe there are some Michif language nests, maybe there's some cooperation between Michif language nests and French immersion preschools. Cooperation, collaboration about early childhood education. Michif, knowledge about Michif is incorporated into language arts courses in grade school, from kindergarten through grade 12. Not only like descriptive information, but like cultural information about it. [...] I think that the Métis people and maybe interested schools could have, like a certain amount of... It depends really on how similar Michif is to certain things. Or dissimilar, you know? I mean, if it's very similar to French, then I think there's really an opportunity to actually integrate a lot of like, even lexical items into French immersion classes, or even just French classes, and just to teach people about dialect diversity. I think goes a long way to... I think that my interest in language education goes beyond strictly Michif, but I think that what Michif could do, could potentially add to that greater language education sort of agenda. (Ryan Mercredi transcript, p. 39)

Stefany Bulmer has the idea to create resources on Michif to share with the community.

Even if they could offer some classes like, even twice a week. Of just, even like, the history of it, some videos of it. More information on it, and where it came from, why it came from, their grandparents spoke it, their ancestors. How did it come, why is it so important. Because it's a part of your culture. You know, just really getting into it. Like, explaining and actually providing some facts that nobody really knows what Michif is. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 30)

Lawrence Mercredi points out that an outcome will be information about this project.

Well, obviously you're going to put everything together and come up with some, some more information. Information's always good, it's a matter of what one wants to do with that information, right? [...] I think you might get some different types of feedback once you put all your stuff together, and you know then you will have, you know, some sort of baseline to... What's our next step? You know. (Lawrence Mercredi transcript, p. 21)

Sonia Minoza suggested Northern Métis language classes, as well as an *app* for iPads.

I think that there should be classes offered to bring back the language to learn about it. [...] With some of the other languages, I have seen that they have gotten the apps for iPads. I think something like that to bring back language would help, I'm not sure how much it would help. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 6; p. 7)

Lee Mandeville would like to see parents be able to choose the language their child takes at school.

At least preserved, you know, or kids learning in school and parents having a choice to pick their language. I know that they have the resources to do it, why can't they do it? (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 14)

George Mandeville addresses the importance of funding.

Access funding, like all of the other languages have rights, like the French have rights to have French, like if you want to go to court and they have rights to have their trial in French, it is part of the Canadian law. So why can't we have Michif part of the curriculum? (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 14)

Lee Mandeville suggests a pilot program.

I know that the Métis nation they have a Cree language program and they do well with that, so just maybe if somebody proposes to them, say you know there is funding available, if you want to try put together a pilot project, and then that might take off, somebody out of Fort Providence Métis can be the champion of that. [...] At least give people the opportunity, open up an avenue for them and say this is available for you, and then we might have it in the curriculum for an option for our kids, but if this data that your collecting helps revive it, than that's good. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 16)

Sonia Minoza suggested a program that is directed specifically at Michif language revitalization.

What I would like to see is perhaps offer, I don't know what you can do, maybe offer a program that is directed to Michif language specifically, and to save the language as well. If that's possible. (Sonia Minoza transcript, p. 8)

Stefany Bulmer suggests putting together a small pamphlet to share that incorporates Michif.

I think that pamphlets should be put together. I was thinking like a little pamphlet of, just start off with simple words in Michif. And then, you know, having a summer camp with, you know, youth. And then doing some traditional Métis stuff, as well as incorporating the language into it. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 24)

Stefany Bulmer imagines that the first step to revitalization involves bringing people together.

The most important steps for Michif revitalization is to have a little committee, brainstorming, coming up with a pilot project, what are the best ways to tackle how we can integrate this language back into the youth and children, the people who don't know it, or the people that were taken to residential school, and could not speak their language anymore. And start off slow with the easier ones, and just again go out on the land, and you know, use a sharing circle. And explain to them why we're doing this, and why it's important. And how they feel. Like a survey, how would you feel if your language was lost? Your culture, your identity, gone. Like, there would be nobody else to help you with it. (Stefany Bulmer transcript, p. 28)

Similar to Stefany Bulmer, Louis foresees a workshop which brings people together as a possible outcome.

It would be interesting to see what the outcome would be if they had a workshop here, on the Métis languages. [...]LC: Yes. Like I was saying before, they have cousins all over the country, you know, so what you need to do to reintroduce all this, is have big workshop [...]So you're going to have to bring this up with all the Métis governments, all the Métis nations. And get them all involved. (Louis Constant transcript, p. 8; p. 21-22)

Lee and George Mandeville also imagine a workshop and gathering, both to get people interested and to raise awareness.

Lee: I think if we had a nice workshop with the music and some of the food and all that. George: Just have like a gathering of all the people interested, or something. Lee: Also I'd like to see it in the media, raise awareness, that there are people here. A book or a video or something. (George and Lee Mandeville transcript, p. 20)

## Chapter 6: Survey Summary, Discussion & Recommendations

In Chapter 5: *The North Slave Métis Language Survey*, we heard the results of the language survey through the voices of community members. Now in Chapter 6, I will first aim to summarize and discuss each theme (§6.1 *Summary of themes*), then go on to discuss the implications of the language survey on the linguistic, cultural, and political landscape of the Northwest Territories in §6.2 *Discussion*. I will provide a few recommendations going forward in §6.3 *Recommendations*.

### 6.1 Summary of themes

#### 6.1.1 Description of the Northern Métis language

One major unknown from the outset of this project was *what exactly is the language spoken by Métis people in the North Slave region*. Remember that in academic writing, by non-Northern Métis writers, it had been called, Michif, Métis-French and French. In meeting with speakers of the language we heard it called even more names; corrupted French, bastardized French, along with Michif and French. However, we were able to speak to a few native speakers of the language and even had the opportunity to hear it spoken. Only one participant was able to provide an elicitation of all the sentences in the interview questionnaire (Appendix 1).

Without substantial elicitations from Métis speakers of the Northern Métis language, it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the exact variety of the language, and its relation to French and/or Michif. That being said, the qualitative evidence presented by those interviewed suggests that variety of the Northern Métis language historically spoken in the North Slave region (and likely extending to the Deh Cho and South Slave regions) is likely not the mixed French-Cree

language, Michif, spoken by some Métis in other parts of Canada and the United States of America. Instead, the anecdotal evidence suggests the language is similar to French, yet different enough for people to make a distinction between speaking “their French” and the general Canadian French of other non-Indigenous Canadians who live in the territory. Some participants described the two varieties of French as mutually unintelligible. Interestingly, a selection of people interviewed who had travelled to New Orleans reported that the French spoken by Métis people in the NWT and the Cajun French spoken in New Orleans was very similar.

From people’s description of the language, we also gain insight into the past attitudes held toward the variety of French Métis people spoke. Many people felt the need to preface the name of the language with a pejorative term, such as “corrupted”, “bastardized”, “sloppy”, “broken”, or “not real” French. Some people were uncomfortable calling the language simply French, or Michif. I believe that this is due to discrimination against this variety of French dating back to the arrival of the first missionaries who brought their variety of French, and continues to this day with Quebecois who are not familiar with this variety of French. In my short time in Yellowknife explaining to people that it is a variety of French, people have jumped straight to conclusions such as “they should just learn the real French, or the modern French” or have suggested that if their language is French, then they should just go to French immersion.

#### 6.1.2 Where is the Northern Métis language spoken?

We also wanted to know where the language was spoken. Participants, particularly Elders remembered the language being spoken widely across the north, and up the tug boat run. Through talking to people, it was reported that this variety of French has been, and likely still may be by Elders, spoken in Fort Resolution, Fort Providence, Fort Smith, Fort Chipewyan, Tsiigehtchic, Fort Norman, and Yellowknife. It was also reported to be spoken in Saskatchewan.

Though not reported by those who were interviewed, Métis-French is also spoken in parts of Alberta and Manitoba.

### 6.1.3 Identity

I gathered together participants' comments about their identity as Métis people, and how language relates to their identity. Overall, the people I interviewed were proud of their Métis heritage, and proud to be Métis. It was common to hear people refer to their culture as distinct from both the First Nations, and settler cultures.

The connection between language and identity was not necessary for all the participants. Some saw their Métis language as a strong part of their identity, while others did not value it as highly as other aspects of their culture.

Another trend I noticed was the difference between those who spoke the language, and those who never learned it. Some speakers of the language did not see the value in the language and were resigned to its demise. This contrasted starkly with some younger people who I interviewed who never had the chance to learn it. These individuals were very passionate about its revival and resurgence.

### 6.1.4 Movement and Migration

The theme of movement and migration ran through a few different veins of people's stories. First, people spoke to the history of Métis people. They spoke about the first Métis who arrived in this area as fur traders. In the history of the Mandeville family, we learned of the migration of three brothers; two who went south, as far as New Orleans and Jamaica, and one who came north, to the Great Slave Lake area. Second, we heard about people who moved due to

residential schools, both because they were sent to them, and because they moved to avoid being sent to them. Finally, we heard about people moving in the north for work.

We saw that the movement and migration patterns of the Métis had an effect on their language practices. In residential schools, children were prohibited from speaking their language, and that included Métis-French. In moving away from smaller communities to avoid residential schools, families left their linguistic community and moved to a place where, at the time, few people spoke Métis-French. People are still moving from their communities to access education. This removes them from their linguistic community. Finally, people moved for work. Similar to moving for school, this removes them from their family and linguistic community with whom they would speak Métis-French. This has an effect on language practices of a community.

#### 6.1.5 Language Shift

Language shift takes place when, over time, one language is replaced by another. In the case of the Métis community we heard stories of the language practices of Métis people changing greatly over time. Not only did we see one language be replaced, but in some cases three or four languages, as generations went from multilingual to monolingual, or sometimes bilingual. In this section, we heard evidence of language shift within families and across communities.

I would like to bring our attention to an interesting aspect of language shift, and that is in the youngest generation. While Michif is no longer spoken amongst the very youngest individuals (the children and grandchildren of participants), these children are sometimes learning an Aboriginal language that their parents did not know. We heard this both in Fort Providence, of the children learning Slavey in school, and in Yellowknife, where some children learned Tłıchǫ through school.



Tony Whitford's personal story gave us insight into an interesting shift. His grandparents spoke four languages, Cree, Chipewyan, English, and French. Between his grandchildren, they speak three languages; English, Tagalog, and Mandarin.

The shift to foreign languages - and perhaps in western Canada, especially Asian languages - as a second language can tell us something about the world we live in. People move, migrate, and immigrate. This will continue to take place in Canada as our population growth does not meet our occupational demand.

#### 6.1.6 Prognosis for the Northern Métis language

We wanted to gain an understanding of what Northern Métis community members thought about the status of their language. Overall, their thoughts about the language was that the prognosis is not good. Participants used the words 'dying, gone, lost, dangerous, and extinct'. Most participants shared the feeling that if the present state of affairs regarding the Northern Métis language efforts (i.e. no revitalization efforts) were to continue, the language would not be spoken in 20 years. This brought up a range of emotions in participants including sadness and some frustration.

#### 6.1.7 Language Revitalization efforts, what comes next?

In this section, we wanted to gain perspective on participants' thoughts on language revitalization efforts. Responses varied from there is nowhere to go, as it is a dead language to we need major revitalization efforts which span across multiple agencies, from government and policy to education.

Participants also talked about the connection between language and culture. They posited with the resurgence of language, there could be a resurgence in cultural activities.

#### 6.1.8 Who plays a role?

Beyond families and schools, participants also had ideas about other people and agencies who can play a role in language revitalization efforts. This included communities as a whole, governments at all levels which includes federal, territorial, and Aboriginal (Métis) governments and/or organizations, researchers, linguists and speakers of the language.

#### 6.1.9 Outcomes and deliverables

Finally, participants spoke about what outcomes and deliverables they could see both in the short term and long term pertaining to Northern Métis language revitalization efforts. In the short term, people suggested organizing a workshop to get people together to talk about Métis-French, share knowledge and pool resources, such as documentation efforts and research. Another short term outcome discussed was sharing the results of the current study, perhaps in the form of a pamphlet for the community.

People also spoke to the need for documentation and recording the language before it is lost. Ideas also included offering classes, languages nests, and incorporating Métis-French into the French curriculum. There was a suggestion to make a Métis-French application for the iPad or iPhone. It was suggested that ideally, parents would be able to choose what language their kids could take at school, with Métis-French being an option.

### 6.2 Discussion

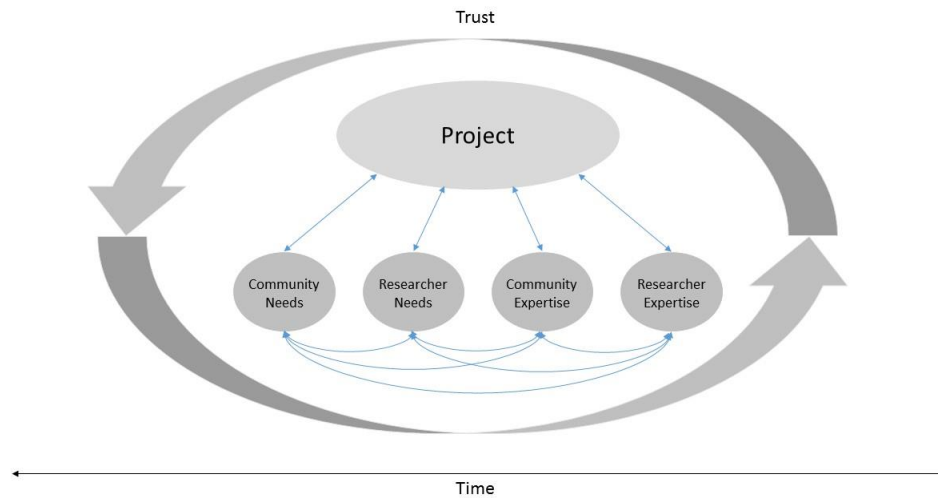
In undertaking this research I had hoped that the results of this study would be useful to the community within which I was working. This is based on the idea that effective research needs

to be more collaborative, community based and grounded in results that contribute to the lives of the people who are participating in it.

This research is just a stepping stone. It has ignited dialogue around Northern Métis languages within the community that will continue. This research has the potential to support efforts to access funding to continue on with language revitalization efforts. As the GNWT devolves its powers to Aboriginal Governments and Organizations, this research builds on, and supports the continued work done by the North Slave Métis Alliance which differentiates them from other cultural groups in the NWT, with distinct language of their own. The implications are that Métis in the north have a unique language that is different from other Canadian varieties of French and other Aboriginal languages in the NWT.

There are also places for other researchers to reflect on my experiences in thinking about how to design their projects. This project attempted to fall within Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) model of Community-Based Language Research, where research on a language is conducted for, with, and by the language-speaking community (see §3.2.1 *Community-Based Language Research and Collaborative methods*). The present research, which is *on* the Northern Métis language, was conducted *for* both the language speaking community, as well as my own needs, *with* participation from community members, and through collaboration with NSMA members Ryan and Stefany, this study was conducted *by* a few of community members, along with the work I put into the project. This model of research worked to some degree for this level of research. While my ideal vision of a truly community-based project would have more members of the community deeply involved in the project, working under this model allowed me to reflect on my own roles and positionality throughout the research.

In §3.2.2 *Notes and thoughts on collaborative frameworks*, I presented Figure 5, a revised model for collaborative field work, which I re-present to you. I want to take a few moments here to discuss how this thesis, and the research conducted, relates to this model.



*Figure 5: Proposed Model of Truly Collaborative Fieldwork. Illustrating partnerships that extend beyond connections solely made through “the project”*

In the context of this thesis, there was a collaboration between community (the NSMA, Métis co-researchers, and people who were interviewed), and researcher (Susan Saunders). The primary community need was to find out more about the Northern Métis language, and my primary need was to conduct fieldwork for my Master’s thesis. It was through this symbiosis that we came together to work on the North Slave Métis Language project, which was our overarching “Project” in the diagram.

The community and researcher both came together with their expertise that they were able to put into the project. Most importantly, community members stepped forward to provide interviews, without which we would have been able to go nowhere with this project. I provided my expertise as a linguist to the project to help it get going. While the NSMA didn’t have the time for their staff to do this type of study, I was at a time in my education, career, and life where

I could put in the time to help design and implement this type of study. Community members with the expertise to conduct interviews and help with research were also instrumental in this project.

While the paragraph above speaks to what was put into the project, it is important that the “Project” synapses back to each group. First, it addressed the community needs, such that the North Slave Métis community will know more about their language history. Second, through the project, I am able to meet a major goal of mine, to complete my thesis. Third, community expertise grows, as people become more aware of Northern Métis languages through our discussions. And finally, my expertise is developed, as I become more experienced as a researcher.

On a secondary level, relationships and connections have been made directly between community needs, researcher needs, community expertise, and researcher expertise. These connections have grown from my involvement in the community. They run deeper than the project, and include going out for lunch with elder Ed Jones, providing a reference for Stefany when she is applying for a new job, sharing meals, and helping neighbours out. These will only continue to grow and my roots in the Northwest Territories grow deeper. Throughout all these shared interactions trust between all parties is developed. If trust happens to be broken, it can hopefully be rebuilt and strengthened.

Overall, this project aimed to build relationships with the community to embrace the four “R”s of ethical research: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility, discussed in §3.2.3 *In which we move from Collaborations to Relations*. In my decision to live, and work in the NWT into the future, is a testament to the value I place on the ongoing relationships with the land and

people of the north. This is something I will discuss further in my concluding thoughts in Chapter 7.

### 6.3 Recommendations

As many participants mentioned, language revitalization efforts need to involve the whole community. A community can be precisely defined, or it can be broadly defined. In this section, I would like to direct recommendations toward the *settler* population of the region, who, along with Aboriginal people in the north make up a section of the broader community of Northerners.

First, I recommend that the whole Canadian, and especially NWT, population become better educated about language diversity, language varieties, and dialect diversity. Prejudices against accents, Aboriginal languages, and language varieties exist. In the context of the Northwest Territories, I would argue that this is very true. This can be seen reflected in the names the Northern Métis language has been called. Furthermore, I have noticed in living here that there seems to be a culture among the *settler* population of valuing certain Aboriginal languages over others. I feel that it has to do with the perceived successfulness of these languages in the face of tremendous pressure to shift to English. In educating all the community about language diversity, I envision a future where people are not discriminated against for their language or the accent they may have. On a similar note, I recommend that the French services offered in the NWT extend to include other varieties of French, and that the divisions overseeing the French language in the NWT be open to other varieties of French, under the assumption that no dialect is better or worse than another dialect.

I also recommend that historians, anthropologists, linguists, and other researchers and academics who are working on Métis culture use the proper terminology when referring to the

language of the particular Métis population with which they are working. Had the name been systematically referred to as what it rightly is, much confusion could be avoided. One can refer to §3.3 *The academic study of* , for an overview of Métis languages. That being said, it will be important for the NSMA and NWT Métis community to come decide what they want to call the language going forward. I would recommend that the chosen name is distinct from both “Michif” and “French” and represents the distinctness of the Northern Métis language that has been documented in this thesis.

As other research is being done on Métis-French in Saskatchewan and by other researchers, I recommend that the results of those studies be shared with stakeholders in the Northwest Territories who have a vested interest in the Northern Métis language. This could include the Métis organizations in the NWT, and the territorial government.

I recommend that when and if feasible, advanced education and employment opportunities should be strengthened in smaller communities in the NWT. In the present study, a major contributor to families’ loss of language revolved around migrating for education and employment. If people have an option to access education and employment in their home community where their language is spoken, language shift could potentially slow down, stop, or even reverse.

While the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to work closely with Aboriginal Governments and language communities in the NWT to strengthen Aboriginal languages, support language revitalization, and officially recognize place names in the Aboriginal languages of the NWT (including recognizing the Michif name *Grande Rivière* for the Mackenzie River), clearer policy and direction regarding Métis languages needs to be

outlined. I would recommend that this is done in collaboration between all Métis groups in the NWT and the GNWT.



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

This thesis was based on a survey of the language practices and attitudes of a Métis community in the North Slave region of the Northwest Territories. Its purpose was two-fold. It documented the results of the language survey through the voices of community members to provide empirical information on the Northern Métis language. Through the research, and by means of this thesis, I also documented and reflected upon the process of working within a northern Métis community while administering a language survey. As such, the conclusions drawn reflect the two purposes.

### **7.1 Northern Métis language Survey**

The survey of the languages of Métis people in the Northwest Territories looked at the language practices and attitudes of Métis people in two communities; Yellowknife and Fort Providence. It was found that the language spoken historically by the Métis community was most likely a variety of French unique to Métis people in the North Slave and Dehcho regions of the NWT. The results of the survey also confirmed that the language shift is rapidly taking place, and, likely, within 20 years the language will be lost.

This research builds upon the body of literature on Indigenous language revitalization, and language endangerment. It has been community-based language research as much as possible, given the capacity, time, and financial constraints of a Master's thesis. The results of the language survey start to paint a picture of Northern Métis languages – a piece of information that has been missing from the northern language mosaic, as the language of Métis people is the

only language of an Aboriginal group Indigenous to the Northwest Territories that is not an official language.

Though the sentiment was not shared by everyone, we heard time and time again how people's Northern Métis language is a part of their identity. Studies have shown that strong cultures and identities make strong people and communities. With the Northwest Territories in an exciting time politically with devolution having taken place April 2014, and devolution of powers being extended to Aboriginal governments, community health and social issues are at the forefront of the public conscience. For a better future for everyone, it matters to support communities in language revitalization efforts, if and when they decide to go down that route.

## **7.2 ...and our stories will go on into the future**

In 2012, when Eric and I officially moved to the NWT, I knew I was in a place where I was comfortable travelling on the land. I could confidently guide my boat down a river, navigate my way across the tundra, or read the sky to know if and when it would be a good time to make long crossing on a lake, or if I should stay near the shore. What I didn't know, was if I would be able to navigate the river of life. We were moving somewhere where we were choosing to build our life. To a place where my first *job* was to find a topic for my Master's thesis and start my fieldwork. To a place where we knew next to no one, yet where we still felt at home. I would soon be engaged, and in a year's time, Eric and I would be getting married. This was our future.

I would be lying if I were to say I wasn't scared. I didn't know if I would be able to make the right relationships with the right people who would help me in the right direction with my fieldwork. I was worried that people wouldn't be interested in collaborating with *me*, a sole, greenhorn, Master's student, who lacked direction, but was open to almost anything. All this on

top of the normal anxieties that everyone has when they move to a new city – will we be able to find a place to live, will we be able to make new friends, will we be able to embrace the Yellowknife winters?

But, as I settled into life in the ‘knife (as people say), and upon meeting with Bill Enge at the NSMA, my nervousness about this new life, and my thesis goals was somewhat dissipated. I began to see a path. I learned that while many Aboriginal organizations, the NSMA included, could likely use a few more staff to get everything done that needs to be done, those that work for them, and lead them, are incredibly passionate about what they do, and who they represent. And while the organization was incredibly busy, I was still offered space to work from, and capital to cover costs related to the project, such as honoraria, help transcribing, and travel. This was greatly appreciated. Through the NSMA, I was also introduced to Ryan and Stefany, who helped me greatly as the project progressed, and we began to interview community members.

Beyond what I learned about Métis languages through talking to people, and what is reported in Chapter 5 of this thesis, I also learned a great deal about Northern life and Northerners. Everyone I met with was incredibly welcoming and kind. When an interview was set up, I felt that people were genuinely happy to talk to me, and any nervousness I had about interviewing them, and how the interview would go, usually disappeared after a few moments of being together. People were helpful with sharing ideas on who to talk to next, and where to go for more information. For this, I am grateful.

As learning tends to go, I have found some answers, but also I have found myself asking more questions, and I have some ideas. I am distraught by the artificial barriers and categories that have been created, especially in the NWT, where people have to fit, and identify. This is something that I want to learn more about and understand the role these categories play in

shaping the future of NWT. The linguist side of me questions the structure and phonology of the Northern Métis language, and I wonder about its future in the NWT. Learning from the community members about their history and languages also made me reflect on my history, my family's history, and my languages. This really does leave a lot of questions, as I truly don't know a lot about my history, or where I came from. Through conversations, I have further reflected on the significance of languages, on the meaning of dialect diversity, and respect for many different views.

I was asked how this project has changed me and I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but then it dawned on me. I navigated the river of relationship building; I crossed the lake of awkward first meetings. I made it, and I am now a proud NWT resident. This may not seem like a direct relation to my thesis topic, but, really, they are linked. I heard from residents, I shared stories with people, I was welcomed into houses. These interactions were overwhelmingly positive and influenced our decision to stay here. This became the place where I want to build my career, the place where I want to grow, and see grow, the place where one day, maybe, we will see our family grow.

I now work with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment with the GNWT. With 11 official languages, I am living and working in a great place where there are myriad opportunities for someone with my expertise as a linguist, the skills I have gained through fieldwork, and the love I have for the people I have met and for the Northern landscape and waterways.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview Questionnaire

#### Métis language attitudes and Michif Language Survey

Date/time	
Participant name	
Chosen pseudonym	
Community/location	
Honorarium given	
Follow-up required	
Notes	

→ Introduce interviewer(s).

→ Obtain verbal consent to record interview, then turn on recorder.

#### Part 1—Biographical:

What is your name?

Are you Métis? (Or Dene?)

What does it mean to be Métis in the north?

#### Part 2—Family history (conversation style - questions are a guide):

→ Introduce this section by telling participant that you would like to learn about their family, what languages their grandparents knew, and where they lived when they spoke these languages. Use the questions below as a checklist, most of the information will be provided in natural conversation. Ask to learn about parents generation too.

Who are your grandparents?

What were their names?

Are those Métis names?

What did you call them? (Kinship terms)

What language is that?

Where were they born?

What languages did your grandparents know?

→ **If Michif<sup>46</sup>, then ask:** What place were they living when they learned Michif?

Who did they learn Michif from?

What work did your grandparents do?

Did they hunt, trap, guide, or gather?

Did they spend time on the land?

→ Clarify sides of family if needed.

Is there anything else you would like to say about your grandparents before we talk about your parents?

-----

Where were your parents born?

What languages did your parents know?

→ **If Michif, then ask:** What place were they living when they learned Michif?

Who did they learn Michif from?

What did your parents do for a living?

What are some of the things that they taught you?

What languages did your parents speak to you?

Do your siblings speak the same language(s) as you?

What languages do they speak?

Is there anything else you would like to say about your parents or siblings before we talk about you?

-----

Where have you lived in your lifetime?

Were any of these places Métis communities?

How did these places compare to be Métis? Was it better or worse to be Métis in some places?

Are there any places that you can think of that have Métis names, or that Métis people have different names for than other groups?

Can you think of any names for places or landmarks that are in Michif (ie. name for Ft.

Providence in Michif, name for Mackenzie River in Michif?

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<sup>46</sup> “Michif” = Michif, Métis, Cree, French, Métis-French, Métis-Cree, or other variants.

Ask them about their language history, use the below questions like a checklist, again, not all need to be asked, most of them come out in natural conversation.

Did you go to school?  
 What grade did you finish in school?  
 What language did you speak at school?  
 When and where did you learn English?  
 What do[/did] you do for a living?  
 When did you get married?  
 What language did your spouse speak at the time?  
 What language do you speak to your spouse?  
 How many children do you have?  
 What languages do your children know?  
 Where did they learn those languages?  
 What language do you use at home?  
 Is that the same language that you use in daily life outside the home?  
 What languages are spoken around you in your community today?

What advice would you give to Métis people?

Part 3—Language practices and attitudes (this can be a conversation, or the questions can be asked):

→ Talk about what language practices and attitudes are. Leave out questions that aren't applicable. “We want to know about Michif, Métis-French, or the other ways Métis people speak. I don't know the difference between Métis-French or Métis-Cree or Michif. Can you teach us?”

Do you think there is a difference between Michif and Métis French?  
 Did any of your family ever talk about Michif?

Do you have any knowledge of Michif?  
 Can you understand Michif?  
 Can you speak Michif?  
 Can you write Michif?  
     (How would you spell Michif?)  
 Can you read Michif?  
 How fluent would you consider yourself?  
 How often do you use Michif?  
 Did you stop speaking Michif? (When? Why?)  
 What do you call the kind of Michif that you speak?  
 Who is your closest relative to speak Michif? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Where do you speak or hear Michif?  
 How many people do you think speak Michif?  
 Where do they live?

How well do other age groups understand Michif?

(0-19, 20-39, 40-59, 60+)

How has Michif changed in your lifetime?

What should be done about Michif?

Can people learn Michif?

Who do you think should be learning Michif?

Who should be teaching Michif?

Where should Michif be spoken?

How do you imagine Michif in 20 years?

Is this how you would like to see Michif in 20 years?

→ **If not:** How would you like to see Michif in 20 years?

Is Michif important?

Why? Why not?

How important is Michif to you?

Is Michif as important as English or languages in the NWT? (Why?)

→ Talk about language endangerment/ language revitalization.

Do you know about language revitalization?

What are the most important steps that need to be taken for Michif?

Who is involved in Michif revitalization and what is their role?

What is the role of individuals in Michif revitalization?

What is the role of family in Michif revitalization?

What is the role of the community in Michif revitalization?

What is the role of organizations like the NSMA in Michif revitalization?

What is the role of schools/colleges/universities in Michif revitalization?

What is the role of the NWT or Canadian government in Michif revitalization?

What is the role of linguists or researchers in Michif revitalization?

Would you like to improve your Michif language skill?

Are you willing to devote time to a language revitalization project?

What skills could you offer a language revitalization program?

Do you have (or know of) any books or recordings in Michif?

Are you willing to be trained in specific skills?

Can you translate?

Can we contact you again?

What would you like to see done with what we find out from this survey?

Do you have anything else to say about Michif?

→ if no elicitation to take place, thank participant, remind them that they can withdraw at any time, and discuss how to refer to them in write up. Name, pseudonym, initials, etc.

Part 4—Elicitation (this part can be done at any time -- it doesn't necessarily have to be done last):

→ Only if participant speaks Michif/ Métis French/ or French, and only if they want to, try to get a recording of their variety of "Michif". Have them tell a story, or have a conversation, if there are 2 people who speak Michif present.

Can you tell a short story in Michif, so we can record what your language sounds like?

Can you say the following sentences in Michif? (From Saskatchewan phrase list.)

Where are you from?

Who were/are your parents?

How old are you?

I walked to the bush.

My family speaks Michif/Cree/Métis-French.

Are there fish in that lake?

I would like to eat some of those fish.

I would like some apples.

I am thirsty and hungry.

I built a cabin and then trapped for fur.

My family once lived in the bush, now they mainly live in the city.

My grandmother made bannock for my whole family.

I hunt moose in the fall, rabbits in the spring, and caribou in the winter.

I collect berries and rat root with my brother and sisters.

Can you say the Lord's prayer in Michif?

Do you know any myths or stories in Michif?

(E.g. Nursery rhymes, songs, jokes, swear words, histories.)

## Appendix 2 – Community Information letter

**NORTH SLAVE MÉTIS ALLIANCE**  
**PO Box 2301 Yellowknife, NT X1A 2P7**



### **Métis Language Attitudes and Michif Language Survey**

Thank you for your interest in the project “Métis Language Attitudes and Michif Language Survey.” This study is looking at the status of the Michif language in the Northwest Territories. The North Slave Métis Alliance is interested in revitalizing Michif, the language historically spoken by many Métis in this area, and by Métis people across Canada. They have partnered with Susan Saunders, who is a graduate student in Linguistics at the University of Victoria who is interested in language revitalization and Michif.

Your time and knowledge is greatly appreciated. We couldn’t do this without you. Your interview will be transcribed, and used to help make a document that the North Slave Métis community can use to teach people about Michif, and the language history of the Métis people of the Northwest Territories. Your interview will also inform Susan in writing her Master’s thesis on community-based language research. If you have any questions about the discussion we just had, please feel free to contact Susan at the North Slave Métis Alliance.

If at any time you want to withdraw your interview from this project, you can do so by contacting Susan.

You may also contact Susan’s supervisor at the University of Victoria, Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins, if you have further questions about this project.

Once again, thank you for your input. We are so glad to have heard from you.

Susan Saunders  
 867-688-8242  
 ss@uvic.ca

NSMA office  
 867-873-6762

Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins  
 250-721-7271  
 eczh@uvic.ca

If you have questions about the ethics of this study, you can also contact the University of Victoria’s experts on ethical research at [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca) or 250-472-4545.

**Appendix 3 – Interview transcripts**

All interview transcripts and recordings are now in the possession of the North Slave Métis Alliance. They are the caretakers of this material into the future. Please contact them if you would like to access this information.

## Appendix 5 – Draft Poster presentation for use on presenting findings





## Appendix 6 – Language Surveys

In designing the Métis Language survey, I accessed previous language surveys from the [CoLang 2012 Workshops webpage](#), where Mary Linn and Keren Rice taught a session on Language Surveys.

The Language surveys that I referenced in creating the Northern Métis language Survey were:

- [Cherokee Nation Language Survey](#)
- [Doghida Project - Language Use and Attitudes Survey: First Nations Languages at Cold Lake First Nation](#)
- [Kalele Project - Tokelau Language Survey](#)
- [Sauk Language Survey And Assessment Project](#)
- [Seminole Nation Language Assessment Survey](#)
- [The Promotion of Inuktitut in Nunavut – Shelley Tulloch](#)
- [Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> Community Language Survey](#)
- [UNESCO Survey: Linguistic Vitality and Diversity](#)
- [Yakama Shaptin Survey](#)