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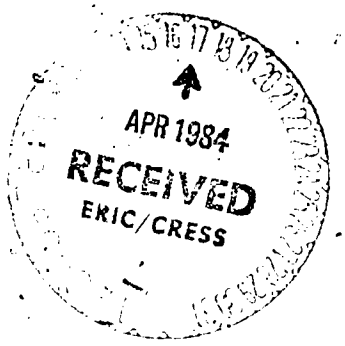
ABSTRACT

The 75 Metis of Mission Metis, Alberta, exhibit three general types of linguistic behavior according to age. Traditional Metis, over 50, are trilingual in English, French, and Cree. Those aged 30-50 speak English and some Cree and understand but do not speak French. Those under 30 speak English. The Mission Metis English and Cree are not exceptional but the French is idiosyncratic as seen in the affrication of dental stops, vowel raising, treatment of gender, and expression of possession. The idiosyncracies suggest the existence of discrete sociolinguistic niches along a continuum characterizing lifestyle and social aspirations, as illustrated by three linguistic case histories. Traditional Metis use French and Cree as personal codes and English as a transactional code. However, they attach no prestige to any language and apparently have no favorite, thus accepting trilingualism as the basis of their identity. Their speech events take place most commonly at home and in the bush. Traditional Metis frequently demonstrate code-switching and code-mixing, especially at the morphological level, as illustrated in three narratives. Despite parallels, Mission Metis people are different from Cajuns. Their education should stress literacy and cultural maintenance through traditional skills, bodily expression, and oral narratives. (SB)



All Mixed: Canadian Metis Sociolinguistic Patterns

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1982
Working Papers in Sociolinguistics No. 101

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ALL MIXED : CANADIAN METIS SOCIOLINGUISTIC PATTERNS

Patrick C. Douaud

Both genetic and cultural halfbreeds exist throughout the colonized world ; yet the Canadian Metis, with perhaps the Cape Colored and the Haitians, are unique in that they were able, during the brief existence of the Metis Nation (1870-1885), to assert their rights against the national government. Those Metis, who gave Canada her only semblance of Indian war with the 1885 Rebellion led by Louis Riel, were the result of unions between French voyageurs, coureurs de bois, or traders with Indian or Halfbreed women. Ethnic variegation was of course accompanied by multilingualism ; and in the course of time the Metis became a highly adapted, yet marginal, group on the Canadian mosaic. It is my purpose here to give a description of some of the sociolinguistic issues raised by the Metis situation, as seen through one small rural community of the province of Alberta.[1]

1. The Mission Metis

This community, known as the Mission Metis, is to be found on the southern shore of Lac La Biche, 220 kilometers northeast of Edmonton ; it derives its name from the Oblate mission around which it has been gathered since the middle of the 19th century. The "traditional" members of this community -- i.e., those who have not been socialized into post-World War II modernity -- are trilingual (French, Cree, English) and

appear to have synthesized the divergent worldviews of the Indian and the Whiteman. Because of this synthesis, few elements of their cultural repertoire are original in themselves ; the Mission Metis' distinctiveness lies rather in the structural relationships obtaining between these elements.

Since the 1960's, however, the community has gradually lost some of this distinctiveness as its internal cohesion disintegrated. While most of the elders are still trilingual; the middle-aged generation is often only passively multilingual ; and the younger generation, reared in a centralized school system and faced with the need to move to job sites operating in English, is clearly monolingual. The linguistic processes are thus intimately related to the degree of involvement in the modern world, and are therefore good indicators of acculturation or personal shift of cultural emphasis.

The Mission Metis are surrounded by a rich variety of human groups. They live ten kilometers from the town of Lac La Biche, which comprises 2200 inhabitants of mixed extraction : anglophone and francophone Euro-Canadians of British, French, Ukrainian, German, and Italian descent, as well as Lebanese, Cree Indians, Metis, etc. The language of the town is predominantly English, but the other tongues can be heard in the homes and in the shops. About eight kilometers southeast of Lac La Biche is the Beaver Lake Indian reserve (300 Cree Indians), where Cree is the dominant language ; and fifty kilometers south of the town lie the two Metis settlements of Caslan (530 people) and Kikino (780), both established just before World War II, and where Cree and English are spoken.

The Mission Metis community now consists of five extended families, distributed in 14 households scattered within a radius of some five

kilometers from the Oblate mission. It barely numbers seventy-five members ; a precise demographic census is inappro[illegible]here, as this population is essentially fluid and moves in an [illegible]the community according to the whims of employment patterns [illegible]ing plans. As with Australian Aboriginal fringe "mobs" (Sansom [illegible]ly the more sessile elders constitute a somewhat stable core which [illegible]be numbered accurately. Otherwise, the community is larger than its population at any given time would give one to believe. Thus 18 individuals (10 women and 8 men) comprise the generation aged 50^{+} ; approxi[illegible]ely 25 people account for the generation aged 30-50 ; and about 30 individuals make up the generation aged 30^{-}. There is a decrease in counting accuracy as one moves down the age scale, because younger people are more likely to go to distant job sites and thus be absent for longer periods.

2. Metis Multilingualism

Three general types of linguistic behavior can be distinguished among the Mission Metis according to age :

(i) individuals of 50 and over : all the men, and some of the women, are fully trilingual. French is usually the language of the home, except when the wife -- sometimes born from a Cree mother and an anglophone father -- has only Cree and English ; then the couple uses Cree at home. Most of the members of this age group have regular contacts with the two Metis settlements of Caslan and Kikino ; some also have friends and relatives on the Beaver Lake Indian reserve.

(ii) individuals between 30 and 50 : the men speak English, sometimes Cree ; they understand French well but do not speak it. Very often their wives have no French background, and speak English and perhaps some Cree ; two of them, married to older Metis of the 50^{+} age

group, have been taught French by their husbands and speak it with a low degree of fluency.

(iii) individuals under 30 : both sexes have only English. Some may be able to understand a limited amount of French or Cree when still at school and therefore living in the multilingual environment of the extended family ; but they quickly lose this ability as soon as they begin to work away from the community.

The triadic character of the older generation's linguistic repertoire is a general feature of traditional Metis-ness ; but of the three languages taken in isolation, only French qualifies as a marker of ethnicity. Whereas Metis Cree is hardly distinguishable from Indian Cree, and Metis English exhibits traits found in a number of non-standard dialects (e.g., copula deletion, tense simplification, loss of friction in dental fricatives, etc), Metis French is idiosyncratic. Beside contrasting with surrounding Albertan French through the presence of back (instead of front) nasalized $\tilde{a}$, the use of unrounded (instead of rounded) nasalized $\tilde{\varepsilon}$ (corresponding to digraph un), and the occasional rendition of r as a uvular fricative instead of an alveolar flap[2], Metis French presents us with several idiosyncracies which will be reviewed now (for further details, see Douaud 1982 : 72ff).

2.1. Affrication of Dental Stops. Under pressure from the Cree language, in which the alveolar/palatal phonological space is occupied by unstable segments whose variation corresponds to diachronic, areal, and socio-linguistic discontinuities, Metis French favors hushing fricatives and affricates, and it affricates its dental stops where Canadian French normally assibilates them :

Canadian French

$$t,d \rightarrow ts,\ dz\ /\ --\ \begin{bmatrix}-cons\\+high\\+front\end{bmatrix}$$

Metis French

$$t,d \rightarrow t\check{s},\ d\check{z}\ /\ --\ \begin{bmatrix}-cons\\+high\\+front\end{bmatrix}$$

For example : tu dis [tsü dzi], tuait [tswe], Métis [mitšif] (where the final segment points to a form Mestif, which according to the Littré dictionary co-existed with Métis in some dialects of France between the 16th and the 19th centuries).

This affrication is manifestly a feature imported from France by the first colonists and systematized under the influence of the Cree phonetic pattern. It is present among the elder Metis of Batoche, northern Saskatchewan ; among the North Dakota Metis, who speak Plains Cree, a Cree-French hybrid, and a "joual" type of Canadian French (Rhodes 1977) ; and it was found in southern Alberta as early as 1860, when a French Metis was known to the anglophones of the area as Butcheesh (Erasmus 1976 : xxii, 114) -- the spelling tch denoting here an affrication in the name Baptiste.

2.2. Vowel Raising. Metis French typically raises oral and mid-high vowels /e/ and /o/ to [i] and [u] in word-final position after coronal consonants and glides :

$$e,o \rightarrow i,u\ /\ \begin{bmatrix}-voc\\+cor\end{bmatrix}\ --\ \#$$

For example : marié [marji], gros [gru], blé [bli], etc. This feature points to an incipient phonemic restructuring of the vocalic pattern, as /e/ raised to [i] has the same effect on the preceding dental stop as an underlying /i/ does -- viz., it triggers a palatalizing process which assimilates /e/ to the category of high front vowels in such an environment : parenté [parătši], de l'autre côté [dlut kutši].

Here again, two factors account for this peculiarity of Metis

French : a tendency to raise front vowels, which must have been widespread among the French dialects imported to Nouvelle-France (even today, Picard and Normand commonly raise /a/ to [i] after a palatal ; see Loriot 1967 : 81) ; and a great deal of instability endemic among the high vowels of Cree and other Algonquian languages (Bloomfield 1946 : 86 ; Pentland 1978 : 111). The raising of oral mid-high vowels is also present in the Metis French of Batoche (Saskatchewan), and doubtless among the elders of other communities which have not been investigated. One must therefore conclude that a uni- or bilateral tendency to raise mid-high vowels in some phonetic environments was imported from France with certain western dialects, and survived and was reinforced in Metis French under the pressure of a similar tendency inherent in some dialects of Cree and other Algonquian languages.

2.3. The Treatment of Gender. The third characteristic of Metis French applies to Metis English as well, and betrays an obvious morpho-semantic influence from Cree. This language does not have the grammatical category of sex-based gender, but instead a distinction [+animate] : pronominal distinctions of genders in terms of [+masc] forms are therefore not relevant to Cree speakers. As a result, il and elle in French, and he, she, and it in English, are in free distribution -- as is common among speakers of gender-marked languages who have a genderless language such as Persian or Hungarian as their mother tongue. A complete disregard for the attribution of correct gender forms is thus another Metis (even more than Cree Indian, because of the use of French) stereotype, which has been taken up by the francophones and anglophones of the area to typify Metis speech in a jocular way. This fluctuation in the use of the pronouns shows no sign of being offset by the establishing of a

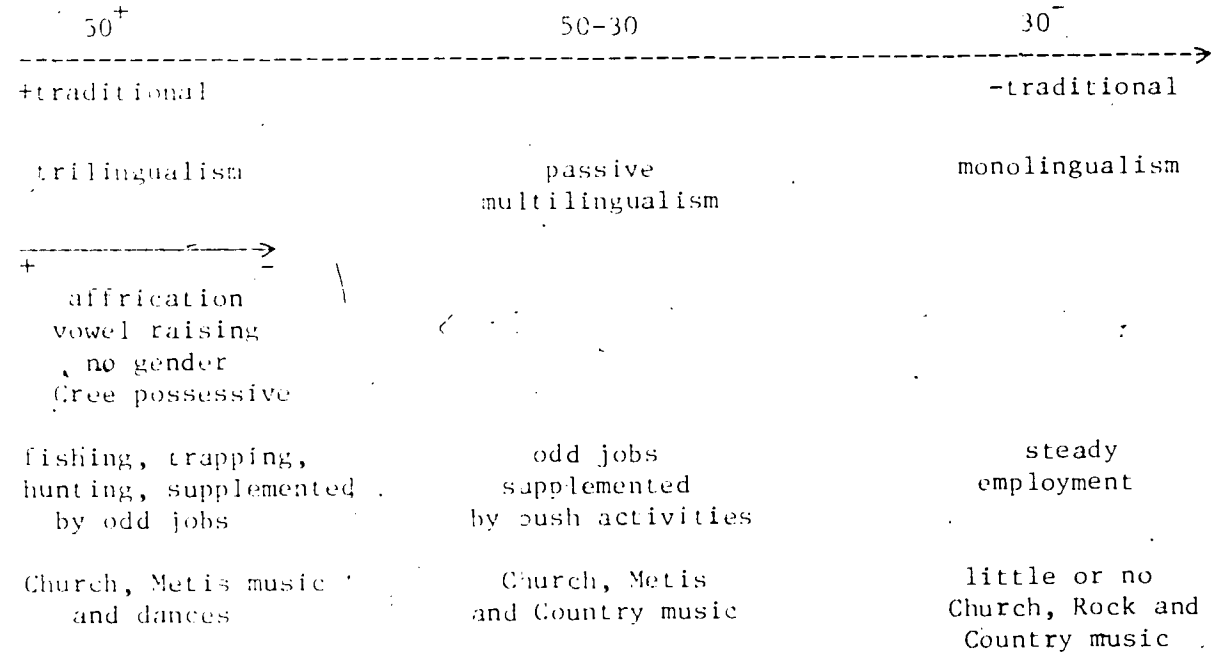
$\left[{}^{+}_{-}\text{animate}\right]$ distinction in French or in English, as the North Dakota Cree-French hybrid has done by retaining Cree suffixes (Rhodes 1977).

2.4. The Expression of Possession. This fourth and last characteristic obtains also in both Metis French and English. In Cree, possession is expressed by a construction of the type $\left[(\text{adj})_i + \text{noun}_j\right] + \left[\text{adj}_i + \text{object}\right]$, as in ki-kosis o-masinahikan "your son's book" (lit. : "your son his book"). This model has been superimposed by Metis speakers on the French and English regular word orders, and we can hear phrases of the type : "Pierre son livre", after Pien o-masinahikan (Elliott 1886 : 181) ; "niya mes poules" (lit. : "me my chickens"), after niya nimiseyasisak (Rhodes 1977 : 15) ; or "my sister his boy" (my own observation).

Other Amerindian languages use this type of construction, e.g., Chinook (Sapir and Swadesh 1964 : 102) and Apache. In the latter case, a similar interference occurs in the speech of bilingual Western Apache when they transfer the native structure onto English : e.g., x bi łíí "x his horse" (Keith Basso : p.c.). Although such constructions can occasionally be heard in familiar French or English, Metis elders use it so consistently that it may be said to represent the regular possessive construction in Metis speech. Also, the expression of possession and the treatment of gender just reviewed remind us that in a polysynthetic language such as Cree, where grammatical functions are expressed through a complex system of affixes rather then with function-words, the word sensu lato (especially in verbal form) is the fundamental unit of discourse. It is to be expected that a Cree-dominated linguistic triad involving such analytic languages as French and English would exhibit some fluctuation in the handling of isolated Romance and Germanic function-words.

3. Patterns of Language Use

The four features just reviewed are all stereotypes of Metis speech ; they are also variables which, by their intensity or frequency, suggest the existence of discrete sociolinguistic niches along a continuum characterizing lifestyle and social aspirations. These four variables apply only to the 50^{+} generation of Mission Metis, and show their orientation on the general continuum of activities and linguistic repertoires which accompanies the total age range :



Three case histories taken as examples will suffice to flesh out this sociolinguistic continuum. Baptiste (age : 53) is married and has thirteen children[3]. He lives on the site of his old house in a new trailer featuring many rooms and all modern facilities ; he is trilingual and illiterate, and his French and English exhibit maximum use of the four variables mentioned earlier. Baptiste began hunting, trapping, and fishing at the age of 13 under the guidance of his father ; and he is known as one of the best woodsmen of the region. For him, bush life is the ideal refuge : "You go into the bush, there you feel fine." Modern conveniences such as the truck,

the snowmobile, and a TV set in the trapline cabin, have been readily accepted and integrated into the traditional patterns. Baptiste associates himself unequivocally with Metis tradition : he thus unquestioningly belongs to the leftmost end of the continuum.

Célestine is a 76-year-old widow who lives in the town of Lac La Biche in a middle-class house, surrounded by furniture and dinner ware in the English style. She devoted her life to commercial activities, and is well-to-do. She speaks only English and French, and seems to have imitated the speech of the clergy when at the mission's convent school. Her French is therefore Albertan French, leaning toward Standard French ; she does not exhibit vowel raising, confusion of genders, or Cree-type possessive constructions -- but her palatalization of dental stops oscillates between assibilation and affrication. I came to see this informant totally ignorant of her Metis background, purporting simply to use the interview to set up a French Albertan control group. Even though I mentioned the Mission Metis several times during the exchange, Célestine never acknowledged any relationship with them ; I learned of the fact later, from some elders who are her cousins. Célestine associates fully with the more modern end of the "traditional" pole, and stigmatizes all the signs of traditional behavior : in spite of her age, she thus belongs to the rightmost side of the 50^{+} category.

Finally, Joseph (age : 36) presents us with the case of a man who has ceased to identify himself with the Metis, and consciously cultivates features normally associated with Western "cowboy" culture. A fervent admirer of "the States," he speaks English with a pronounced drawl unusual in the region and sharply retroflexed r's, wears pointed boots, and has graced his pick-up truck with pictures of sparsely clad girls. Being single and having obtained a substantial compensation following a serious

injury received while on duty as a night watchman, Joseph leads a leisurely life and has turned to angling, an activity almost unknown among net-fishing Mission Metis. Angling allows Joseph to demonstrate his skill and his knowledge of the lake ; for him jackfish is the only "noble" fish, and the value of the catch is directly proportional to the resistance it has offered -- an attitude which runs counter to the traditional bushman's primary concern for economical survival techniques. Although he speaks Cree fluently (apparently because of his continuous association with Cree girls), Joseph pretends to be a passive multilingual. As he also is free from the influence of the Church and reaps the benefits of employment insurance, he belongs to the least traditional part of the 30-50 age category.

In spite of the discontinuity of language use obtaining between (and to a lesser extent, within) generations, the Mission Metis linguistic situation has failed to give rise to a state of diglossia. Diglossia and triglossia can be considered the most extreme examples of stable compartmentalization, and they normally involve an urban literate component, as in Abdulaziz's (1972) Tanzanian case. In Tanzania, Swahili is used "in its various registers including slang and colloquial forms" (p. 201) by people who have completed secondary school ; the second code, English, is considered bookish and prestigious ; and the third code, a local tribal language varying with each region, is on the wane -- thus preparing the way for a diglossic situation similar to that common in the Caribbean.

Such a state of affairs could not possibly obtain among traditional Mission Metis, who are both rural and largely illiterate. Their case is more readily comparable to that of numerous rural communities in India, where language compartmentalization has been maintained by social compart-

mentalization, and where formal education plays a minor role (Gumperz and Wilson 1971 : 153). The only difference is that in the Metis case it is not only social, but also ethnic factors which have maintained linguistic compartmentalization. Also, the difference in degree of convergence in the two situations has as its source a much shorter period of contact and an evolution in an environment marked by motility in the Metis case, as opposed to the sessile character of the rural communities of India. Metis society thus seems to have lacked the self-contained character necessary for the formation of diglossic patterns -- an otherwise quasi-universal feature of human communication present even in sign language communities (Deuchar 1978).

4. Mixing as Metis-ness

The Mission Metis community can be considered classless, with elder trilinguals wielding languages in the place of styles and younger monolinguals developing an awareness of the function of different styles in English. Gumperz (1971á : 230) has recognized this phenomenon :

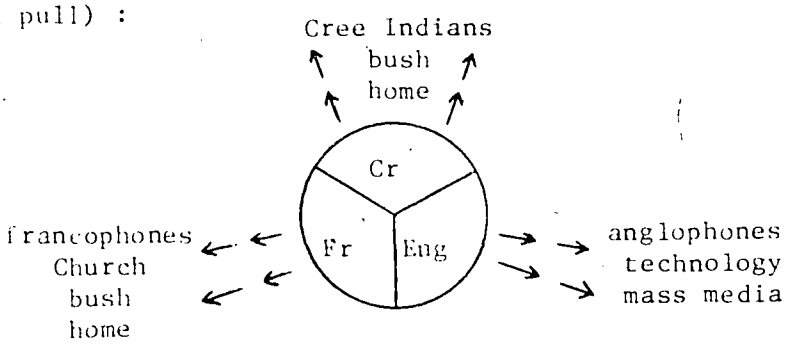
> The same social pressures which would lead a monolingual to change from colloquial to formal or technical styles may induce a bilingual to shift from one language to another.

In this way traditional speakers have categorical rules for each language (Metis French, Cree, and English), and variable rules for variation across languages.

The most that can be done in trying to elicit styles in this case is to place the members of the linguistic triad within the framework of interactional dimension proposed by Blom and Gumperz (1972) : Cree and French can then be viewed as personal codes (used with the inner group and

for subsistence activities), while English is clearly transactional (outer groups and technological domains). As a possible explanation for this dearth of styles, I suggest that three languages with two or more styles each would be a heavy, unadaptive linguistic burden for a society with a semi-nomadic background, a loose internal egalitarian organization, and a pluralistic oral tradition.

Labov (1972 : 535) defines the prestige model as "the pattern which speakers hear themselves using : it governs the audio-monitoring of the speech signal" ; to this he opposes the motor-controlled model of casual speech. From this point of view, Mission Metis speech events -- devoid of stylistic nuances, and therefore casual -- are strictly motor-controlled and governed by the following situational dynamics (where ⟹ represents functional pull) :



There is no degree of prestige attached to any of the three languages, and neither are overt or covert prestige forms to be found in the Mission Metis linguistic repertoire. Very little consideration is given surface variation, whether the output be one of the three languages, or a mixing of two or even all three of them : sensitivity to dialects and accents appears blunted -- subordinated as it is to efficiency of communication. Traditional speakers, when asked which language they prefer, invariably answer : C'est tout de même pour moi, tout mêlé (It's all the same to me -- all mixed). Such a statement stresses their acceptance of trilingualism as the basis of their identity, at the same time as it treats as irrelevant

the idiosyncracies so conspicuous to outsiders -- or, better perhaps, sublimates them as essential to the concept of Metis-ness, based on "mixing." Traditional Mission Metis are perfectly insensitive to the concept of higher/lower varieties, and have little definite sense of the appropriate use of a particular feature or a particular language for a strictly social purpose : thus French tu and vous are used in a thoroughly inconsistent way with outsiders, and one language takes on more value than the others only when it is required in a certain kind of situation, with a certain kind of participants.

Discussing Vygotskii's notion of the importance of social contact between child and adult, Luria (1980 : 31) observes :

> Vygotskii's supposition that an action initially shared by two people later becomes an element of individual behavior has, as a corollary, the social origin of the higher mental functions, and points to the social nature of those psychological phenomena that have usually been regarded as purely individualistic.

Similarly, one can consider that the Mission Metis' socialization into adequate linguistic behavior has come to be conditioned by micro-social -- or more exactly by situational -- factors : they have always co-existed with and related to what are still the three major ethnic groups of the Lac La Biche region, and have set up the three corresponding media of communication as an adaptation to the sociolinguistic environment. Efficiently integrated to their milieu, they are socially viewed as marginal by their neighbors only because they happen to be the only individuals belonging to three different cultural groups at the same time.

5. Speech Events

Speech events take place in a variety of situations, the most common of which belong to the home (involving both men and women) and to the bush (involving mainly men). Among the 50^{-} generations, the conversations are usually as eclectic as among White groups of the same age. The 50^{+} elders are likely to talk about past events and cross-cultural connections ; they enjoy emphasizing the geographical spread of their family names, and readily find themselves distant relatives all over western and northern Canada -- thereby demonstrating the "long-distance sociability" that some consider a criterion of Metis ethnicity (Slobodin 1981 : 364). They often hint at their popularity in the remote northern communities they sometimes visit :

> Si j'aurais été méchant ils ont pas voulu me voir any more (If I was a mean guy they wouldn't want to see me again).

However, the pleasure of meeting old acquaintances is often tempered by the passage of time :

> J'ai été seize ans à Yellowknife (I lived sixteen years in Yellowknife).... They were real happy to see me again : all those Indians, and everybody... all the old guys I went to... la maison où ce qu'ils gardent les vieux, là (that house where they keep the old ones)... Ah, they don't know (= recognize) you.

Speech events are normally characterized by a great deal of language mixing, especially when outsiders participate. At this level, one can distinguish between two phenomena : code-switching and code-mixing. The latter -- a subcategory of the former -- refers to what Labov (1971 : 457) calls "rapid code-switching," which he suspects to be largely unsystematic. He gives as an example this type of discourse, heard from a New York Puerto

Rican speaker :

> Por eso cada, you know it's nothing to be proud of, porque yo no estoy proud of it, as a matter of fact I hate it, pero viene Viernes y Sábado, yo estoy...

Far from finding such mixings unsystematic, Gumperz (1971b : 317) holds that they are by no means rare in multilingual speech and that they "signal a change in interpersonal relationship in the direction of greater informality or personal warmth."

However, Gumperz falls short of characterizing the full range of code-mixing when he declares that constructions of the type *he era regador (he was an irrigator) seem to be impossible in bilingual discourse (ibid. : 320). My own fieldwork has elicited numerous Metis examples of code-mixing at the morphological level which disprove this assertion : e.g., stakait [stɛke] (English stake + French 3rd person sing. imperfect suffix -ait + French oxytonic), or climber [klajme] (English climb + French infinitive suffix -er + French oxytonic). The fact that English [stejk] and [k^hlajm] become French [stɛk] and [klajm] -- i.e., lose their characteristically un-French post-vocalic glide and consonantal aspiration respectively -- corroborates Sankoff and Poplack's (1981) free morpheme constraint on code-mixing : viz., for a switch to occur within a word, the free morpheme must have been phonologically integrated into the language of the bound morpheme. Such an extreme type of code-mixing appears to be directly proportional to the degree of involvement in the discourse and thus to be a carrier, if not of personal warmth, at any rate of a message of personal significance.

As we have already seen, the real richness of the Mission Metis' linguistic repertoire lies in multilingualism. However, the repertoire in its traditional state (as represented by the 50^+ generation) is a very

relaxed affair whose efficacy is taken for granted. This situation contrasts sharply with that obtaining in such cultures as the Australian Aborigines', where name taboo is still very much alive (von Sturmer 1981 : 16) and the spoken word is invested with so much physical reality that it can be given and stolen -- even among the partly modernized fringe dwellers (Sansom 1980 : 24ff). On the other hand, among the Mission Metis as in most Amerindian cultures, speech is not overly valued and silence has its place, too. Even now, at a time when the influence of schooling is beginning to be felt in the homes, Mission Metis children are not specifically taught to speak, and actually start speaking late by White middle-class standards -- a behavior consistent with the normal Cree pattern.

In traditional Mission Metis terms, then, "proper language" is not style-bound : it is simply a medium which, like every item in the bushman's panoply, must be adaptable, tough, and unobtrusive. In other words, it must be able to respond immediately and adequately to communicative needs : "If you speak French, I speak French ; English, I speak English ; same thing for Cree," as the elders put it. This expression is more than just a tautology : it stresses the fact that one <u>never</u> even thinks of imposing any one language in the conversation for reasons of ideology or the sake of greater ease. The probing of ethnicity through language, so common in francophone Canada (see for example Heller 1978), is almost non-existent among the Mission Metis, who treat their interlocutors in the same manner whatever language initiates the exchange. We have seen that things are changing, though, as the younger generations have progressively discarded the traditional linguistic triad for a style-conscious, one-coded repertoire based on English alone.

6. Mission Metis Narratives

A brief look at several types of narrative performance will help us probe the various facets of Metis personality revealed to me qua listener differing in cultural background. In each case the setting was somewhat artificial, as I was the principal listener and my avowed purpose was to keep a record of a dying tradition. However, I learned the basic fact that a typical Mission Metis narrative is always told or sung in French -- otherwise it "wouldn't be Metis". No special allegiance to the French language is implied, but simply the observance of a well-established custom. This relativistic attitude is illustrated by the following exchange :

> Me (showing my wedding ring) : What's the Metis word for this ?
>
> Louis (age : 50) : Jonc. Ahtšaniš. Le jonc c'est le Canaven, Mitchif c'est ahtšaniš (Jonc is Canadian French, ahtšaniš is Metis).

In this case the Cree word happens to be more typically Metis than the French one -- another example of the loyalty-free, "all mixed" character of the linguistic economy under study. The Mission Metis are also just as relaxed toward narrative performance as they are toward general linguistic performance : there exists no formal narrative situation comparable to that prevailing among the Cree (see e.g., Darnell 1974), and the delivery of stories is decidedly Gallic in its emotional involvement and kinesic accompaniment. Yet, the Indian influence is evident in the nature of some topics, and in the frequently peripheral treatment which lets the listener draw his own conclusions. The following story presents such an example.

6.1. The Man Changed Into a Moose.

"Ma grand-mère il avait été dans l'île -- l'île Bourque, ça s'appellait. Je change tout à c't'heure : c'était un autre nom. Je change

tout, je vous dis. Anyway, elle était avec des sauvages dans l'Île, à ramasser des cerises. So... en petit canot d'écorce -- dans ce temps-là y avait pas des gros bateaux, c'était des petits canots d'écorce. And this woman had a little baby, smaller than your little girl here. Elles étaient dans un maillot dans ce temps-là, tu sais qu'un maillot ce que c'est ? Anyway, ils ont mis la petite fille dans le bout du canot, and they pull that little canoe to the... to the shore. Puis ils ont commencé à ramasser des cerises, là. Tout d'un coup, un petit vent, une petite risée de vent, là, a venu. Le canot a parti sur l'eau. So, à peu près, oh, cinq-six minutes, la bonne femme elle se revire puis elle regarde : elle voit le canot pas mal au large. Ah, elle commence à pleurer, she didn't know what to do : her little baby, her little baby ! So there was a man, her husband, was a little ways, you see : he runs at the point of the island, and all at once they see a big moose with his horns and everything (to his son giggling : "This is no bullshit, that's happened too !"). Oh, puis la bonne femme elle voulait se tuer à pleurer. C'te gros moose-là il s'en venait drette au canot : quand il est arrivé au canot, c'était un homme. Il a embarqué dans le canot, il s'en vient là en paddlant, avec le petit bébé... it was her husband. Ça c'est une histoire vraie. C'est arrivé."

(My grandmother had gone to an island -- Bourque Island, it was called. I change everything these days : it was another name. I'm telling you, I change everything. Anyway, she was with some Indians on the island, busy picking berries. So... in a small bark canoe : in those days there were no big boats, just little bark canoes. And this woman had a little baby, smaller than your little girl there. They were in moss bags in those days, you know what a moss bag is ? Anyway, they put the little girl at

one end of the canoe, and they pull that little canoe to the... to the shore. Then they started picking berries. Suddenly a light wind, a little breeze of a wind rose. The canoe left the shore. So after about, oh, five or six minutes the woman turns around and looks : she sees the little canoe a fair distance away. Ah, she begins to cry, she didn't know what to do : her little baby, her little baby ! So there was a man, her husband, was a little ways, you see : he runs to the point of the island, and all at once they see a big moose with his antlers and everything (to his son giggling : "This is no bullshit, that's happened too !"). Oh, and the woman was fit to kill herself crying. That big moose was coming straight to the canoe : when he arrived, it was a man. He boarded the canoe, and here he comes paddling, with the little baby... it was her husband. That's a true story. It happened.)

This unusual event was narrated by Boniface (age : 69), known by his neighbors as a great talker who spurns the bounds of likelihood -- or, as they put it succinctly, a "bullshitter." This is part of a series of narratives that fall well within the domain of mistapew (spirit helper) and windigo (cannibal spirit) Cree stories, which draw heavily on supernatural elements. The presence of ad hoc factual patchings, the lack of formal structure, and the un-Indian concern for some kind of a climax make this story appear to be a corrupted version of an original Cree story.

6.2. The Priest's Impertinence.

The second most common type, the ludic narrative, is typical of the bawdy stories one still hears after a hearty banquet in small French farms. Their saturnalian function of relaxing customary restraint is well known, and they normally cover taboo-loaded topics such as the Church,

sex, and the excretory functions.

"A l'ancien temps, il y avait le vieux fran... un vieux français... I was just telling them when you were coming, I was telling them... There was an old guy, I says, he used to live... called Roux : celui-là... So, il dit... ils l'ont invité, puisque c'était un français de France. Monseigneur, il était à la table. Ils ont invité le Père Roux, pour qu'il vienne dîner avec le... Monseigneur. Puis ils l'ont placé drette au bord de Monseigneur. Monseigneur, il était au bout de la table ; puis y avait le Père Le Goff : sontait français, itou, le Père Le Goff. Puis il était pas mal... plus mûr... avec ses petits yeux comme ça, là... oh ! il me donnait des coups de pied dans le cul : je l'ai jamais aimé, ce Père-là ! But, anyway, c'te vieux Roux-là, il était assis, là, et puis, quand... ils ont dit leurs grâces, et puis il s'est assis. Puis ils ont servi le dîner. Puis le Père Roux il lance un gros, un... une vesse. Le Père Le Goff a rien dit, Monseigneur a rien dit itou. La deuxième fois il se lève la fesse, puis il te lâche un maudit de pet encore. "Ah, ah, ah, ah ! Monsieur Roux !" il dit, "C'est pas poli de faire ça à la table." Le Père Roux il dit, il dit : "Mon Père, c'est ben mieux de crever devant la compagnie que de crever tout seul !" (Laughs) Oh, bonjour ! il avait son mot à dire, hein ?"

(In the old days there was that old French... an old Frenchman... I was just telling them when you were coming, I was telling them... There was an old guy, I says, he used to live... called Roux : that one... So, he says... he'd been invited, because he was a Frenchman from France. The bishop was at the table. They'd invited Father Roux to dinner with his Lordship. The bishop was at the end of the table, then there was Father Le Goff... he was French, too, Father Le Goff. And he was rather... drunk... with his small eyes, like that... Oh ! he used to kick me in the ass -- I

never liked him, that Father ! But, anyway, that old fellow Roux was sitting, and then, when... they said grace, and then he sat down. Then dinner was served. And Father Roux lets out a big... a fart. Father Le Goff said nothing ; his Lordship said nothing either. The second time he lifts his buttock and lets out another of those damn farts. "Ah, ah, ah, ah ! Mister Roux" says he, "It's not polite to do that at the table." Father Roux says : "Father, I'd rather burst in front of the company than burst on my own !" (Laughs) Oh, my ! that was some answer, wasn't it ?"

6.3. Trois Beaux Navires.

Finally, the elder Mission Metis have a dying repertoire of songs, which belong to two categories : a) sentimental French songs, once fashionable in France or Quebec at the turn of the century (e.g., Je veux revoir ma Normandie) ; and b) old French songs imported to Nouvelle-France by the colonists in the 17th and 18th centuries. The second type includes many songs formerly popular in the French army and characterized by spontaneity and absence of sophistication ; many sections of these songs have been forgotten, and very often the meaning is perceived as obscure. One chorus will serve as a brief example of this style :

"Trois beaux navires sont arrivés, trois beaux navires sont arrivés,
Chargés du blé, chargés d'l'avoine.
Nous allons sur l'eau, nous allons en s'promenant,
Nous allons jouer dans l'Île, dans l'Île..."

(Three nice ships have arrived, three nice ships have arrived,
Loaded with wheat, loaded with oats.
On the water we go, leisurely we go,
We go and play on the isle, on the isle...)

The Metis had a buffering role on the moving Canadian frontier ; then some of their communities evolved a sophisticated form of polity with the short-lived Metis Nation (1870-1885) ; and eventually official recognition broke down after the 1885 Riel Rebellion, so that being Metis nowadays is largely a matter of perception. Unlike the Whites and the Indians, the Metis generally do not control resources ; moreover, they "do not have a specific homeland or habitat as do Indian tribes, communities, or dialect groupings" (Slobodin 1981 : 361). A Metis is primarily identified as part of an extended northern network of relationships based on kinship and commensality rather then occupational pursuits ; his basically Euro-American kinship system is made more flexible and far-reaching by the use of the Cree term nistaw (brother-in-law) with affines and acquaintances alike.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the Mission Metis and the Louisiana Cajuns. Both groups are vague about their origins and emphasize their synthetic identity : "Un Cadjin ? C'est du sang mêlé" (A Cajun ? It's a mixed-blood), say the elders of Mamou Prairie (Gold 1979 : 268). Both Cajun and Mission Metis youths are seemingly uninterested in their traditional cultures ; and in both cases the elders are passive repositories of these cultures. However, several differences emerge under closer scrutiny. For one thing, the Mission Metis have no history of oppression : at the Oblate school, for instance, instruction was given in English in the morning, and French in the afternoon ; Cree was tolerated outside the classroom and, then as now, was probably "used as a private and privileged form of communication in the presence of White persons who don't understand the language" (Card et al. 1963 : 188). It follows that no Mission Metis generation seems to have any strong feeling one

way or the other where revivalism is concerned. This situation is in marked contrast with that of the Cajuns, among whom the forbidding of French at school after 1930 fostered a generation of militant merchant-professional middle-class individuals bent on sustaining local traditions. However, these values have proved difficult to transmit to post-1960's youths.

Compared to the Mission Metis, the typical Cajun community is well circumscribed in terms of identity. The Cajuns are normally endogamous -- a practice made possible by their substantial numbers ; also, the fact that they have only one personal code (French) makes for a well-defined group association. The strong situational value of Cajun French is thus a ready marker of revived ethnicity in those communities such as Lafourche Parish, which are currently undergoing a re-definition of cultural values (Larouche 1980). In such situations there is a dichotomy of identities (American/Cajun), as opposed to the typical Metis integration of ethnic personalities ("All mixed"). This divergence of attitudes is best illustrated in linguistic terms : whereas the Cajuns of Louisiana and the French Albertans surrounding the Mission Metis have passed from monolingualism (French) to bilingualism (French-English), the Mission Metis as a community have increasingly become monolingual speakers of English.

This situation symbolizes two different ways for marginal groups to open to the modern world. With job sites literally on the spot and a wealth of economic opportunities (bayou and sea fishing, oil resources), most Cajuns have adopted the ethic of entrepreneurship and are effectively exploiting the dominant system. On the other hand, the Mission Metis enjoy limited environmental opportunities, and only a few have access to the local 55-strong fishing cooperative. Their lack of motivation in

terms of entrepreneurship is evidenced by their attitude toward mink ranching : whereas the local Lebanese Muslims continued this activity well into the 1960's (Barclay 1968), the Metis gave up shortly after the tullabee (or cisco) fish -- the minks' staple food -- became depleted in the post-World War II period. The disappearance of this cheap feed had been promptly interpreted as a harbinger of undue hardships in a trade which in any case was never popular among individuals of Native ancestry.

8. Education

In spite of their passivity regarding modernity, the Mission Metis show a great deal of respect for education, which they view as promoting economic stability. However, books are not part of the normal household articles, and along the whole age range reading is subordinated to TV viewing, as is the rule in most Native communities (see e.g., Philips 1975 : 373, for an account of the situation on the Warm Springs Indian reservation). Formal education is thus confined to the school environment, which takes over the socialization of children from the elders after the age of six ; the conflict thus created is but an exacerbation of that obtaining in the general White school population, where

> too often students view reading as something that will help them to learn specific skills related to school instruction, but that is unrelated to their own need to comprehend the written language that surrounds them. They may not recognize that many of their daily contacts with written language outside the classroom (reading TV guides, comic books, the Bible, bubble-gum cards) are legitimate reading experiences that help them develop reading strategies (Goodman and Burke 1980 : 45-6).

However, the centralized Lac La Biche school system generates few conflicts, as Mission Metis youths have not been exposed to militant

minority nationalism. Also, they have no urban past and are not members of a street culture with powerful constraints and loyalties, as they still live within the shrinking orbit of the extended families that comprise the greater part of their peer group. Finally, in terms of the distance principle of language mismatch (Shuy 1979 : 188), the Mission Metis fare better than lower-class urban ethnic groups : English is too recent an import into the community to have fostered a wealth of vernacular features estranging their dialect from the one used for instruction.

What the Mission Metis share with urban non-middle class milieux is a concern for action rather than lengthy verbalization. In the same way as a New York Puerto Rican adolescent's definition of a friend may be "someone who when you say to him, Let's go somewhere, he goes with you" (Labov et al. 1968 : 27), a Fort Chipewyan girl defines home as "where you usually go" (Scollon and Scollon 1979 : 182) ; and Mission Metis similarly avoid verbose and static definitions of what they view as dynamic concepts. This attitude is part of the North American Native's emphasis on independence, which calls for egalitarian participation in classroom activities and makes group projects of a non-competitive nature quasi-mandatory :

> Where the classroom situation is one in which children of more than one cultural background come together, efforts should be made to allow for a complementary diversity in the modes of communication through which learning and measurement of "success" take place (Philips 1972 : 393).

Due to a lack of awareness of these matters on many teachers' part, this attitude is observed only in the most general sense in the schools of Lac La Biche. Regarding the avoidance of eye contact among children of Native ancestry, for instance, a teacher once boasted to me : "Shy or not,

I make them look me straight in the eyes !" However, the pupils come from such diverse backgrounds that some measure of flexibility can hardly be avoided by the teaching staffs ; as a result, the Metis and Cree children of Lac La Biche do not seem to put on the "mask of silence" so common among other Natives such as the Sioux and Cherokees (Dumont 1972 : 346).

The fluidity that characterizes Metis historical and contemporary structures has caused them to be overlooked in the school curriculum ; yet they could be an excellent example in the teaching of the value of ethnic identity and self-image to children from more sessile backgrounds -- as well as an opportunity for schools to learn to cater more for local conditions. One of the means to this end is a greater use of "literacy as a mode of communication" (Philips 1975).

That literacy has played only a minor role in the traditional Catholic schooling of the Canadian Metis is obvious from the fact that the Mission Metis have not produced a single priest or lay brother in almost 150 years of close association with the Oblate mission. Flanagan (1979 : 6) has already noted the lack of Metis and Indian clergy in Canada, despite an apparently widespread religiosity. Obviously, the goal of the Catholic Church in North America was simply to save souls from damnation, and the spiritual steadfastness of the local population was not deemed fit to be trusted with the proselytizing of others : this was a typically colonial attitude, far removed from the use the Catholic Church made of its European, and especially Irish, flocks in expanding its spiritual empire (see e.g., Titley and Douaud 1982).

It is now time for literacy to be conveyed to Mission Metis children in order to take the place of those traditional activities which are not taught them any more. As befits a Native group, literacy must not be presented as a solitary activity, and should concern itself with local

material (Philips 1975 : 380-1) such as customs, family names and genealogies, and traditional narratives. Concerning the latter, a recent study (Cronin 1980) has shown that the Indian and Metis children of the Lac La Biche region are acculturated enough to recall stories with conventional European structure better than stories with traditional Cree structure. However, it would be possible to use traditional narrative structure to familiarize Native children with the culture they are gradually losing, and thereby preserve cultural continuity within the dominant society (Cronin 1982).

As applied to the Canadian Metis, such an endeavor would involve a teaching focusing on traditional skills : smoking whitefish, collecting snow for water consumption, gathering red willow bast or mihkwapemak (for mixing with ordinary tobacco) ; on bodily expression (fiddle-playing, dancing Red River jigs) ; and on oral narratives (adapted from French into English). Needless to say, a multicultural background or a sound anthropological training would be a must for the teachers involved in these pursuits ; as usual, the training of Metis teachers or aids for this purpose seems advisable.

Footnotes

1 The fieldwork on which this study is based was made possible by two grants-in-aid from the University of Alberta's Boreal Institute For Northern Studies (1979 and 1981).

2 These three peculiarities can be explained away by the long co-existence of the Metis with Standard French-speaking Oblate missionaries.

3 All the names mentioned in this section are pseudonyms.

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