



The Words of Our Ancestors:

An Introduction to Michif
and Indigenous Language
Revitalization



MÉTIS NATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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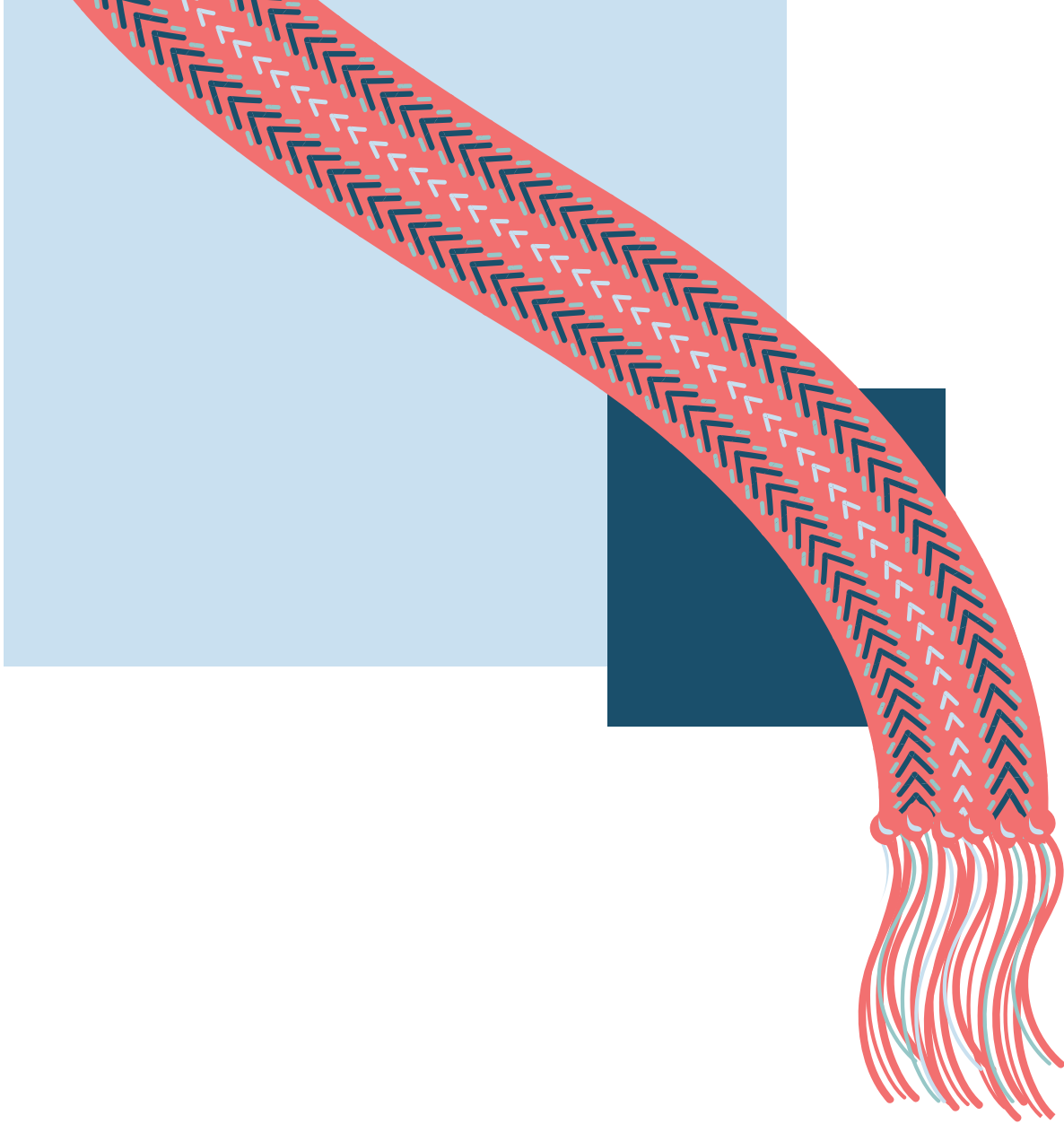


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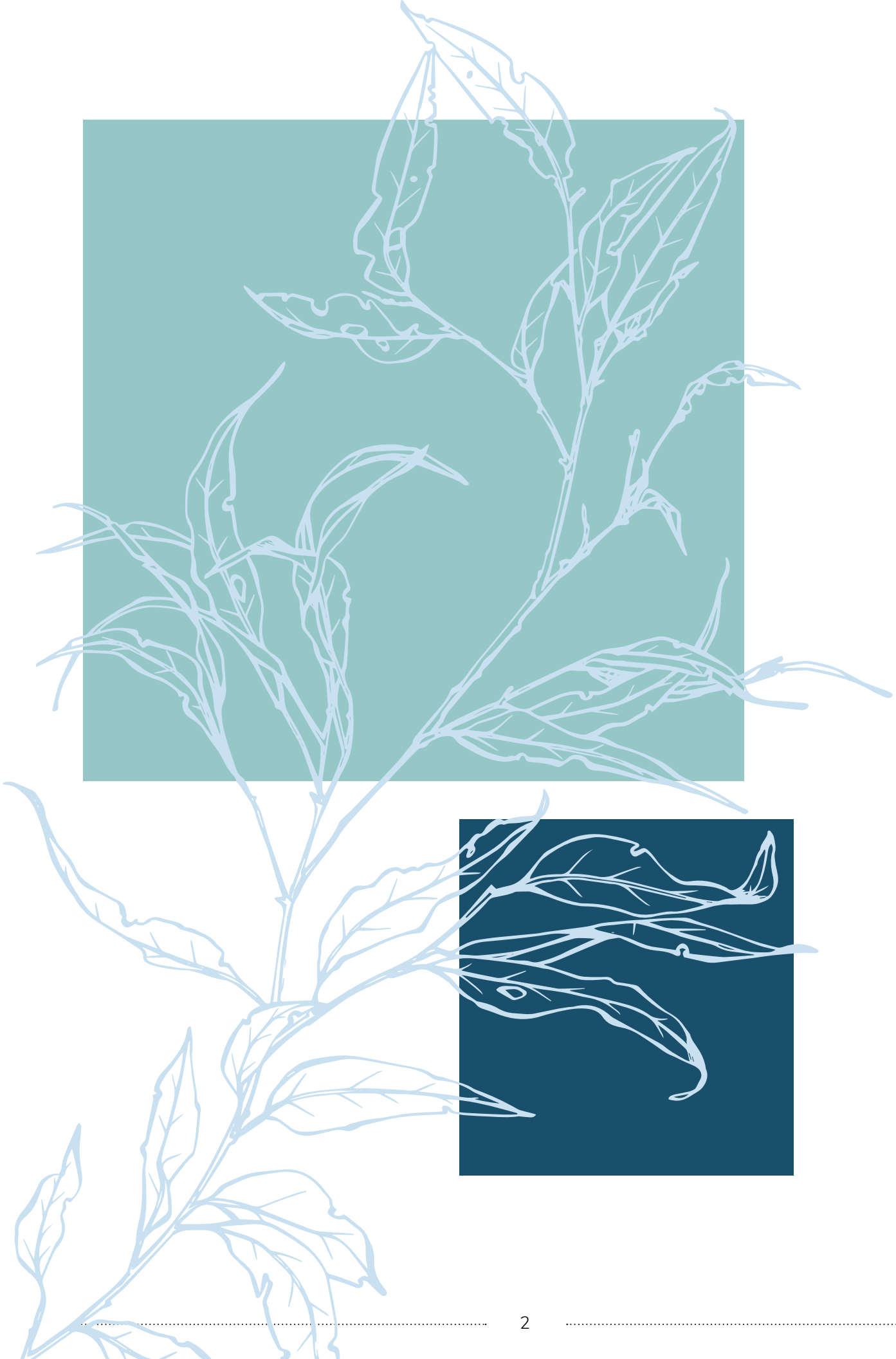
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- Dale McCreery, linguist and language teacher
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SUMMARY

Michif¹ languages are unique languages that are historically linked to Métis communities across the Métis homeland. The three Michif languages, commonly referred to as Southern, Northern, and French Michif, and are made up of elements from both First Nations languages (Cree and Saulteaux) and European languages (French and English). In the Michif languages, the two most prominent source languages are Cree and French, while Saulteaux and English contribute to a lesser extent.

While Northern, Southern, and French Michif are considered critically endangered today, Métis people and communities across Canada and the US are working to revitalize these languages to ensure current and future generations have access to them.

There are many ways that communities and individuals can approach learning and working to revitalize our Michif languages. Community members of all ages can take up language learning by creating or joining communities of practice or creating space for others to learn. Language is an important aspect of culture and identity, and Métis people have many reasons to take pride in and celebrate our Métis languages.

If you don't have any experience with Michif, this resource is a good place to start. Due to being forced to hide their identity, many Métis families have been disconnected from culture and language and are now reconnecting. It is never too late to learn!

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What experience do you have with languages (Michif or otherwise)? Are there any languages other than English that are spoken in your family?

1) For this resource, Southern Michif, Northern Michif, and French Michif are referred to as separate languages because they are different enough that speakers of one language may not be able to understand speakers of another. Some other resources use the terms variations, varieties, or variants when speaking of these three languages. These various terms are all seeking to express that there are significant differences between the three, but all three are important to the identity of the Métis. In Métis communities, many people will use the term Michif to refer to all the multiple varieties of the language. From a linguistics standpoint, the variations are different enough that they can also be described as different languages (Mazzoli, 2020, 48).



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource can be used as a starting point for individuals and communities looking to learn more about the different Michif languages and language learning methods. The guide is meant to inspire those interested in learning a Michif language to begin building a relationship with the language and provide resources to support their language learning goals. The sections are organized as follows:

- Section 1 provides an overview of the Michif languages
- Section 2 describes the current status and future of the Michif languages
- Section 3 provides guidance to individuals embarking on their Michif language learning journey
- Section 4 supports communities seeking information about language revitalization strategies
- Section 5 describes three case studies of Indigenous language revitalization
- Section 6 provides a list of current resources to support language learning

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INTRODUCTION

This resource was developed by Métis Nation British Columbia's (MNBC) Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Language to share information about Michif and language revitalization.

This resource includes an overview of the three Michif languages and other languages spoken by Métis people, how to get started learning a Michif language, different approaches to language revitalization, stories from language learners, and different resources for learning more about our languages or language revitalization.

DEFINITIONS

Throughout this resource, we use the term “Indigenous language revitalization.” We envision “Indigenous language revitalization” as an ongoing journey that communities take to reclaim, uplift, and share their ancestral language(s) with current and future generations. By framing language revitalization as a journey and not a destination, we aim to encourage language learners and speakers to continue sharing, learning, and speaking Michif languages, so that these languages can continue to thrive within the Métis community.



SECTION 1

OVERVIEW OF THE MICHIF LANGUAGE

■ Northern Michif, as written by Elder Vince Ahenakew and Elder Ted Ratt of Île-à-la-Crosse, SK

■ French Michif as written by Elder Jules Chartrand of St. Laurent, MB

■ Southern Michif, as written by Elder Norman Fleury of St Lazare, MB

When people talk about language in a Métis context, they often refer to Michif, which can refer to any or all of the three Michif languages that were created by the Métis. This section provides an overview of Métis people's relationship to languages as a multilingual community, and the origins of the Michif languages.

MÉTIS PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIP TO LANGUAGES

The Métis have historically been a multilingual community. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, many Métis were able to speak First Nations languages, such as Cree and Saulteaux, as well as European languages, such as French, Gaelic, and English. Métis people were also frequently able to speak the trade languages or creoles of their regions, such as Bungi, Brayet, and Chinook Jargon.^{2 3} Over time, the Métis also created their own languages, which were called Michif. The word Michif comes from the old French word 'Métif' or 'Mitif,' which meant 'of mixed ancestry.'⁴ Today, the word Michif is sometimes used by Métis people as a way to identify themselves as Métis, in addition to referring to one or all three of the Michif languages.

2) Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 164, 270-274; Peter Bakker and Richard Papen, "Michif and other languages of the Canadian Métis," *University of Amsterdam and Université du Québec à Montréal* (2003): 3.

3) Bungi, Brayet, and Chinook Jargon are trade languages that were spoken by early Métis communities, however, are considered sleeping languages, with few to no known fluent speakers.

4) Bakker and Papen, 3.

The Michif languages are unique.⁵ They are complex languages which draw on both French and Cree as the primary source languages.⁶ Because Métis communities are spread out across Canada, there are localized dialects within each of the Michif languages that stem from different geographic regions. Many Michif speakers carry pieces of their home communities across the Métis diaspora. Michif languages reflect the unique history of the Métis Nation and the diversity of the communities that make up the Nation.

MICHIF ORIGINS

Due to a lack of historical records, it is difficult to know for certain the exact origins of Michif. The origins of French Michif and Northern Michif are under researched, and it is therefore challenging to know when they developed in Métis communities.

For Southern Michif, a commonly cited explanation is that it developed within the Métis community of the Red River settlement in the early to mid-1800s, during a period when Métis identity was growing and strengthening.⁷ Before the Michif languages developed, the Métis likely spoke a combination of First Nations and European languages (French, Saulteaux, Cree, English, etc.)⁸. Through frequent interactions with different communities in both the Red River settlement and the Plains, the mixed language known as Southern Michif formed among the Red River Métis community.⁹

Over time, three distinct languages (Northern Michif, Southern Michif, and French Michif), were developed and spoken among the Métis people. These Michif languages distinguished the Métis as a distinct group with an identity separate from their European and First Nations ancestors.¹⁰

THE DIFFERENT MICHIF LANGUAGES

The word Michif can be used to describe one or all three different Michif languages – Southern Michif, Northern Michif, and French Michif. While there are differing views on where Michif languages fall within different language families, it is important to note that the three languages were created by Métis communities and are integral to Métis identity.

5) Judy Iseke, "Negotiating Métis culture in Michif: Disrupting Indigenous language shift," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no.2 (2013): 96.

6) Bakker, *A Language of Our Own*, 4; Gillon, Carrie, and Nicole Rosen, with Verna DeMontigny. 2018. *Nominal Contact in Michif*. Oxford Studies of Endangered Languages. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

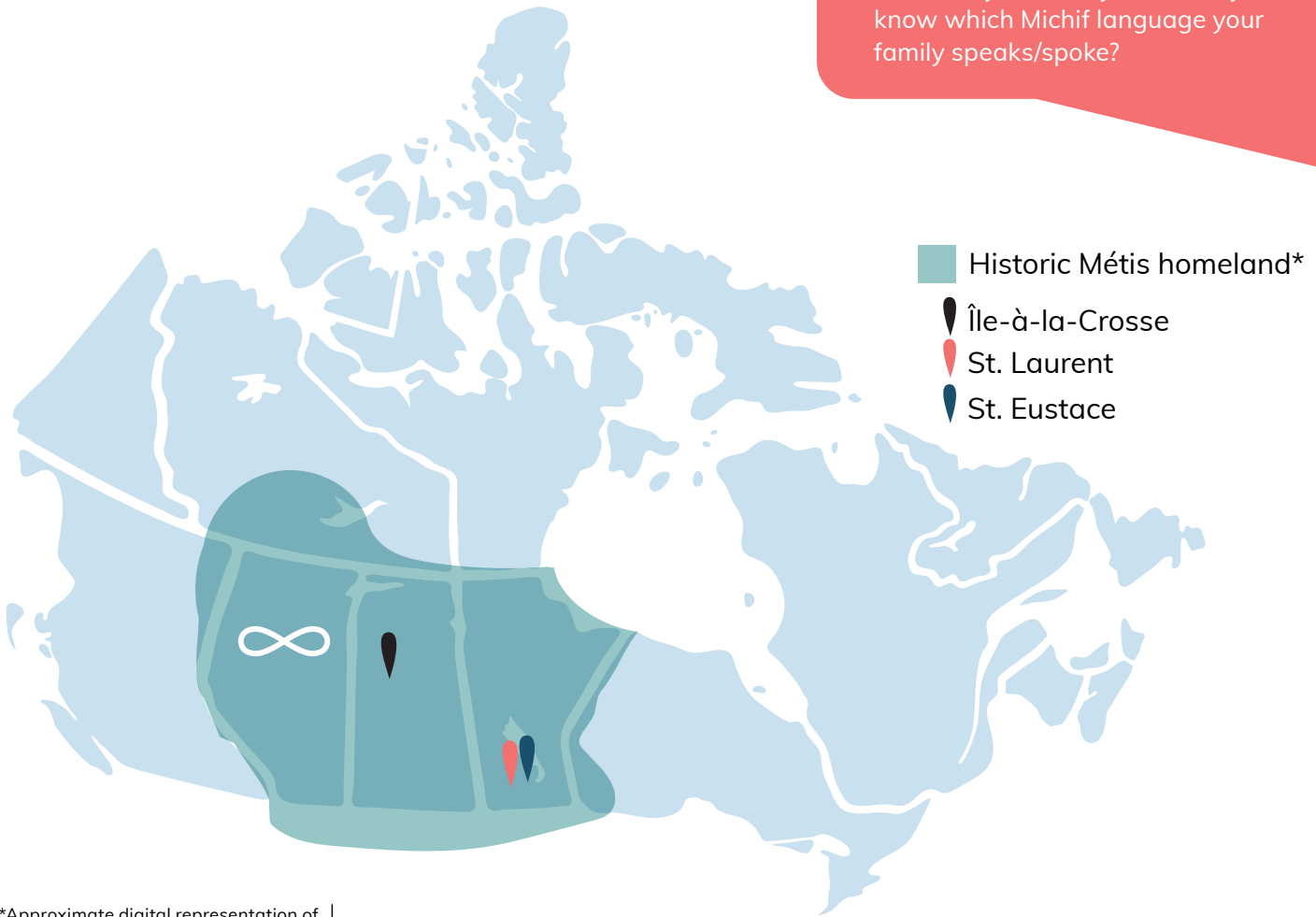
7) Métis Nation British Columbia, *Kaa-Wiichihitoyaahk: We Take Care of Each Other – Métis Perspectives on Cultural Wellness*. (Surrey: Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia, 2021), 27; Oral history, Mike Keplin/Dale McCreery.

8) Bakker, *A Language of Our Own*, 173, 270.

9) Bakker, 275.

10) Iseke, "Negotiating Métis culture in Michif," 96; Bakker, *A Language of Our Own*, 52-53.

REFLECTION QUESTION:
Where is your family from? Do you
know which Michif language your
family speaks/spoke?



*Approximate digital representation of the Métis homelands.

Graphic Source: Métis National Council, via: Brandson, Ashley, "MNC Passes A Motion Declaring the Official Homeland of the Métis People," APTN, November 30, 2018. <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/mnc-passes-a-motion-declaring-the-official-homeland-of-the-metis-people/>

- **Southern Michif** uses mostly Plains-Cree verbs and French nouns, but also borrows nouns from English, Saulteaux, and Cree.¹¹ Southern Michif is most associated with communities in southern Saskatchewan and North Dakota.¹² Southern Michif may also be referred to as Heritage Michif, Mixed Michif, or Turtle Mountain Chippewa Cree.
- **Northern Michif** is a mostly Cree-based Michif language, with fewer French nouns than Southern Michif or French Michif. Northern Michif has historically been spoken in Northwestern Saskatchewan and Northern Alberta.¹³ Northern Michif may also be referred to as Michif-Cree or Île-à-la-Crosse Michif.
- **French Michif** is based on a Western Canadian dialect of French, with some Saulteaux and Cree words.¹⁴ French Michif has historically been tied to communities like St. Laurent and St. Eustache in Manitoba.¹⁵ French Michif may also be referred to as Michif French.

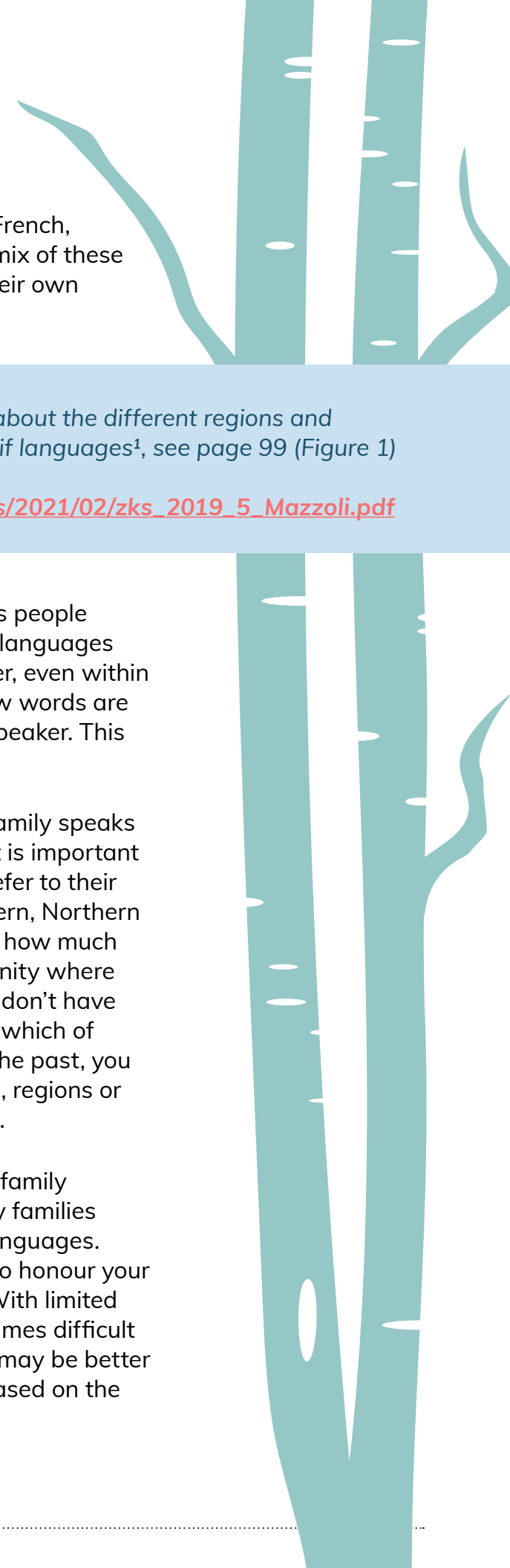
11) Bakker and Papen, "Michif and other languages of the Canadian Métis," 5-6.

12) Maria Mazzoli, "Michif Loss and Resilience in Four Métis Communities," *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* no. 39 (2019): 98.

13) Mazzoli, 98.

14) Mazzoli, 98.

15) Lawrence Barkwell. "Michif Language Background Paper – An Overview of the Last 35 Years," Métis National Council, Gabriel Dumont Institute, and the Louis Riel Institute (2017): 3.



While Southern, Northern and French Michif draw on French, Cree, Saulteaux, and English – they are not a random mix of these languages. Each of the three Michif languages have their own grammar, pronunciations, spelling, and vocabulary.

Further reading: If you are interested in learning more about the different regions and communities that are associated with each of the Michif languages¹, see page 99 (Figure 1) in Maria Mazzoli's free online article:

http://www.kanada-studien.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/zks_2019_5_Mazzoli.pdf

All three of the Michif languages are important to Métis people and culture. The existence of the three different Michif languages reflects the diversity of the Métis Nation itself. Moreover, even within the three Michif languages, there are differences in how words are spoken or written, depending on the community and speaker. This all contributes to the richness of Métis culture.

If you are interested in learning which language your family speaks and have family members who actively speak Michif, it is important to know that some mother tongue speakers may not refer to their language as the names we know them by now (Southern, Northern or French). Instead, they might describe it in relation to how much Cree or French is used in their language, or the community where they learned it (example: Île-à-la-Crosse Michif). If you don't have any family members who speak Michif and are unsure which of the Michif languages your family may have spoken in the past, you can narrow it down by looking into which communities, regions or historic Métis settlements your Métis ancestors lived in.

It can be meaningful to learn the Michif language your family predominantly spoke; however, keep in mind that many families may have had speakers of two or more of the Michif languages. Learning any of our languages can be a fulfilling way to honour your family and build connection to language and culture. With limited resources for some of the Michif languages, it is sometimes difficult to choose which language you would like to learn and may be better to assess which language is most accessible for you based on the speakers and resources you have access to.

The table below provides examples of common greetings and phrases in Southern, Northern and French Michif. Because Michif was primarily an oral language, there is no one “right” way to spell the words. Rather, the spelling systems for each language may vary depending on the speaker, although some systems are becoming widespread. As such, it is important to acknowledge the speaker when sharing Michif.

	Southern Michif*	Northern Michif**	French Michif***
Hello	Taanishi	Tân’si	Allo
My name is....	(Norm) dishinikawshon	(Ted) nisihkâson	Mon nom si (Jules)
Thank you	Marsii	Marrsî / kinanâskom’tin	Marsi



*Southern Michif – as spoken and spelled by Elder Norman Fleury of St. Lazare, Manitoba.

**Northern Michif – as spoken by Elder Ted Ratt and spelled by Elder Vince Ahenakew and Elder Ted Ratt of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan.

***French Michif – as spoken and spelled by Elder Jules Chartrand, of St. Laurent, Manitoba.

SECTION 2

CURRENT STATUS AND THE FUTURE OF MICHIF

Despite declining rates of fluent speakers, Michif languages have a future and will continue to thrive in future generations, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Métis community. Michif is being re-introduced to Métis communities across the country through language initiatives and resources to ensure current and future generations of Métis can access, use, and pass on Michif languages. Language revitalization requires that intergenerational transmission be re-established. Intergenerational transmission is the process of parents and grandparents passing on the language to the younger generations.

You do not have to become a fluent speaker to support the intergenerational transmission of Michif. Learning basic greetings and phrases in Michif provides you with valuable language skills, encourages others to learn, and supports the intergenerational health of Michif.

Language is an important aspect of Métis cultural identity and wellbeing. Although not every learner will become fluent in a Michif language, being able to connect to the culture through language is important.

Language learning is part of “bringing back the pieces of who we are as a people and a nation”

– Language learner interviewee, Monique Courcelles





SECTION 3

BEGINNING YOUR INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING JOURNEY

This section is intended for individuals getting started on their personal language learning journeys. If you are working with a community group or organization and want to know more about language revitalization methods for communities, go to Section 4.

Beginning a language journey can be daunting. However, learning Michif is extremely rewarding. While learning with other learners in a group setting alongside a fluent speaker is ideal, this is often not possible for most learners, for a variety of reasons. If you find that you are unable to find a group that you can learn with, you can still start your language learning journey through self-directed study; however, it will require a lot of dedication and patience. Learners should always try and seek out opportunities to practice with others even if taking a self-directed path of learning.

This section covers myths about language learning, strategies for language learning goals, tips for learning on your own, and methods to evaluate language resources.

MYTHS

There are a lot of myths about learning Indigenous languages like Michif. Here are some of those myths and why they are untrue:

1. “I can’t learn a new language if I didn’t learn it as a child.”

This is a common misconception that discourages many adults from learning a new language. While children are adept at picking up languages, this does not mean adults cannot learn a new language later in life. Language learning is possible for community members of all ages.¹⁶ Furthermore, adults bring unique strengths to language learning. Adults often have a clear idea of what motivates them to learn and have a general understanding of what methods or resources work best for their individual learning style.

2. “I must become fluent in the language to make a difference.”

Learning and sharing the language is an important part of language revitalization from a community-driven model. By learning, regardless of your level of fluency, you are promoting the language to others around you, and you might inspire others to start learning.¹⁷

3. “Learning from reading and writing the language will help me learn the language faster than listening and speaking.”

Since formal education often places an emphasis on learning languages through reading and writing first, there is an assumption that this is the best way to learn a language. However, our brains are better at learning languages through hearing and speaking the language. While learning writing systems can be important and helpful for some learners, it is recommended that learners focus as much as possible on communicating through listening and speaking first.¹⁸



16) Steven Brown and Jenifer Larson-Hill. “Second Language Acquisition Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching,” University of Michigan Press (2012); Britt Dunlop, Suzanne Gessner, and Aliana Parker, “Language for Life: Nourishing Indigenous Languages in the Home,” First Peoples’ Cultural Council (2019): 10.

17) Dunlop et al., “Language for Life,” 5-10.

18) Dunlop et al., 10.

WORKING TOWARDS FLUENCY

Many language learners start with a goal of fluency in mind. However, working towards fluency in a Michif language is an intensive process and a lifelong journey.

It can take learners hundreds of hours in language-intensive study to become proficient in a language. Becoming proficient in a Michif language is a lifestyle change that requires extreme dedication. While learning a language is difficult, it can also be joyful and fulfilling. Learning a Michif language is transformative and more than worth the effort.

It is important to remember that not all paths lead to fluency, and that is okay! If your goal is to learn some phrases to use around the house with your family, introduce yourself in the language, or hold a simple conversation with a relative who speaks Michif, those are also good goals worth pursuing. Any activities that help us connect with our Métis culture, practices and communities only strengthens our identity and cultural wellness as Métis people.



TIPS FOR SELF-DIRECTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Learning a language on your own is difficult. It is useful to find people to practice with if possible. Try seeking out other learners in your local community or look online (see resources section for ideas on where to look).

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN BEGINNING YOUR MICHIF LEARNING JOURNEY:

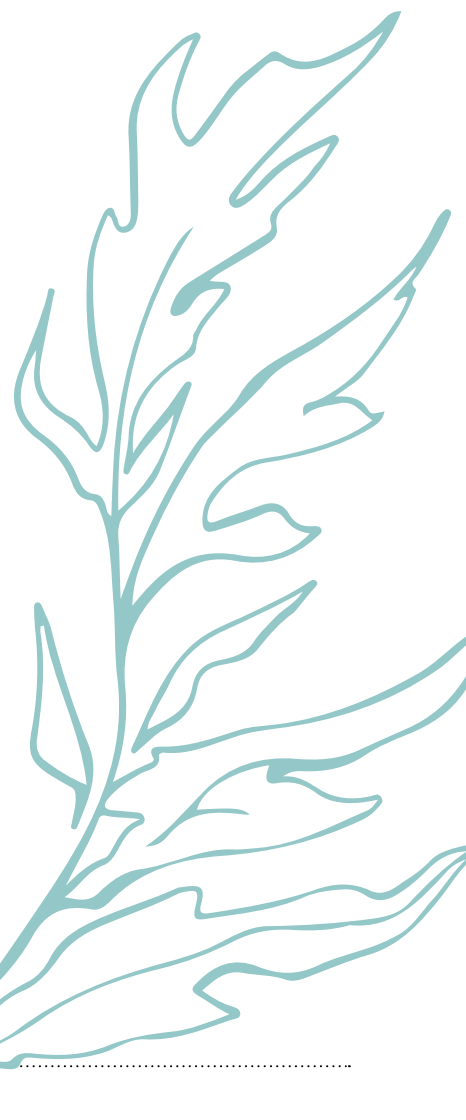
- Which Michif language are you interested in learning? What are your short and long-term goals for learning the language? (E.g., be able to introduce yourself, provide a prayer, have a basic conversation, talk about your family history, etc.). To see some examples of goals you can work towards see the [NEȪOLNEW Assessment Tool](#).

- What would a learning schedule look like for you? When would you find time to learn, and how often? (If you are interested in becoming fluent, consider committing at least an hour a day to learning if possible).
- Are there any speakers or language learning groups in your local community or online who can support you?
- What are the different learning resources that are available for the Michif language you'd like to learn (e.g., websites, apps, games, books, virtual pre-recorded classes, university courses, YouTube videos)?
- If taking online courses, are there any groups online or in-person where you can practice your language skills outside of the course (e.g., through social media, your chartered community, etc.)?
- Who are your allies/supporters/language buddies? Is there anyone in your social circle (family member, friend, coworker) who can celebrate your successes and understand your frustrations throughout your language learning journey? What steps can you take to expand your social circle?

EVALUATING LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES

There are several different language learning resources available for Michif languages. However, the resources that are the most helpful to each person may vary. Here are some questions to ask to determine whether a resource is appropriate for your language learning needs:

1. If the resource is self-paced – how will I ensure I keep on track and study consistently?
2. Does this resource have audio and/or video recordings so I can hear examples of the people speaking the language?
3. Is this resource created by or in partnership with fluent speakers?
4. Is this resource engaging to me?
5. Is this resource adequate for my level of language knowledge?
6. Will this resource help me achieve my specific goals? (e.g., do greetings, provide a blessing/prayer, have basic or complex conversations in the language, etc.)





INTERVIEWS WITH MICHIF LEARNERS

Three Michif language learners in BC shared their experiences learning Michif, including how they got involved in language learning, and how they overcame obstacles through their language learning journey. Below, we summarize what they shared with us about their experiences.

As you read about each of the language learners' journeys, keep in mind that no two learners have the same language learning experiences and there isn't one "right" way to learn Michif.

TRISH KELLY

Trish (she/her) started learning Southern Michif during the pandemic, through an online Southern Michif beginner course with her Aunt Marion. Aside from participating in the Southern Michif course, she has been primarily learning on her own. While she finds learning alone challenging at times, Trish seeks ways to incorporate language learning into her daily life including talking to her dogs in Michif, using it in the kitchen, and accessing online Michif dictionary apps.

"Because I'm learning so late in life, I'm really leaning on technology... I have to have a lot of discipline to try and make improvements. But I feel really inspired by one of my teachers who said that it's okay to just...[aim] for developing a relationship to the language. It doesn't have to be that your goal is becoming completely fluent."

Within Trish's family, her mother's generation was disconnected from their language. Trish is inspired to learn the language her grandparents and ancestors spoke as an act of resistance and love. She hopes to pass on the language to the children in her family and community as an auntie.



"I did not grow up with a connection to the culture or language, but I do feel motivated to make this journey as part of my way to contribute in the future to the Métis Nation. As I step forward into this next phase of my life, I am looking for ways to be an active citizen, to be someone who stewards the culture in some small way."

Trish's favourite word in Michif is "sweetheart," or "**nîcimos**," which was the nickname Trish's grandmother gave to Trish's mother as a child.

"It's the only phrase that my mother knew of Michif... I never met my great-grandmother, because she died before I was born... but this is a message I got from three generations of my family...a term of absolute love. Even though... my mother didn't have the language, she was able to share that [love] with me."

MONIQUE AND DANIELLE COURCELLES

Monique (she/her, they/them), and Danielle (all pronouns) are adult siblings who are learning Southern Michif together.

Monique became inspired to learn the language when she attended a Michif immersive kitchen party in Winnipeg in 2019. Danielle became inspired to learn when he listened to a podcast about the connection between language and culture. Since the start of their respective language learning journeys, they have tried several language learning resources and methods to find what works best for them.

"My language learning journey has...not been linear...I started a little bit with the online program I've been taking... but it wasn't working for me... I joined a weekly Michif group, which was super helpful. I would practice the day before....and then Monique and I would try to talk on the phone a little bit together to practice [the] sentences that we learned." - Danielle

Danielle and Monique both agree that language learning is a process of building a relationship with the language, which takes time and patience. Danielle also notes that it is difficult to learn without continuous access to a fluent speaker but is grateful to have their sibling to practice with.

"It has been really great to learn together... we are relatively new at the language so being able to practice together even simple



sentences... has been a lot of fun ... There's more consistency in the learning when we do it together." - Monique

"I feel silly because I am bad at pronouncing the words... it's not so easy to immerse yourself into it...you have to learn it in small pieces that are digestible." – Danielle

Monique and Danielle feel that language learning is both frustrating, joyful, and a lesson in being gentle with oneself and each other. Danielle describes loving the feeling of speaking Southern Michif words that are borrowed from Cree.

"When it comes to reclaiming language, I feel very conflicted. I feel joyful, and I really love the language and learning it, but it's also infuriating and takes patience and kindness for myself. And there's shame... we have a complex family history on our Métis side and there has been a lot of disconnect....reclaiming culture is...complex." - Monique

"I wish there was someone I could talk to who could tell me the stories behind the words... but I'm also really happy that I'm doing it, because there aren't many speakers. There's very, very few, so it's nice to be able to think that one day... if I work hard, I might be able to be one of those speakers." - Danielle

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What resonated with you when reading about Monique, Danielle, and Trish's language learning journeys? How do you feel after learning about others' journey to learn/ reclaim their language?

For Monique and Danielle, language learning is a form of resisting, reclaiming Métis language and culture, and building a stronger, more connected Métis Nation.

WATCH THE INTERVIEWS

To watch filmed interviews of Trish, Monique, and Danielle, visit MNBC's YouTube page by scanning the QR code here:



Trish



Monique &
Danielle

SECTION 4

LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION FOR COMMUNITIES

This section is intended for Métis communities interested in learning more about language revitalization methods at a group or community level. It includes an overview of different language learning methods and language learning supports.

Language Learning Methods

Good language learning strategies prioritize developing listening and speaking skills. The human mind learns language first through speaking and listening. Writing is only one representation of the language. Language learning programs that focus on immersing students in the language can help students develop practical conversational skills.¹⁹

Many different approaches are needed for communities to revitalize a language into common use. While language-as-subject classroom-based learning is what people typically think of when learning a new language, this approach only works for some learners, and is not the most effective way to create new proficient speakers. Communities that want to grow their speaker base should look to incorporating immersion teaching methods instead.

Some examples of immersion teaching methods that focus on hearing and speaking the language include:

Language Nests

Language nests preferably involve a fluent Elder and a facilitator or teacher working together in a daycare, preschool, or elementary school.²⁰ The schools mimic a home environment to help children learn the language as if they were learning it from family members at home.²¹ These can be especially effective when one or more parent



19) Anke Al-Bataineh, "Best Practices in Language Teaching and Indigenous Language Revitalization," *Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle* (2021): 3.

20) Al-Bataineh, 2.

21) Al-Bataineh, 2.

also attends the nest and is able to learn language with their child.²² Because babies and young children don't have the same challenges in acquiring new languages, language nests provide opportunities for communities to create new generations of speakers, who then need ongoing opportunities to use and share their languages.

Project-Based Language Learning

Typically used for older children or adult learners, Project-Based Language Learning (PBL) allows students to work entirely in the language to create a project that solves or addresses a real-world issue or topic, for example, creating a project that identifies a local environmental issue.²³ This approach allows learners to learn how to discuss complex ideas in the language and collaborate with others.²⁴

Mentor-Apprentice Language Learning Method (MAP)

Mentor-Apprentice Language Learning Method (MAP) is a language immersion program designed for adults and older youth. MAP consists of a mother tongue speaker (the mentor) and learner (the apprentice) working together to learn the language through everyday activities in the community and on the land.²⁵ This can be an effective strategy for communities that have access to a speaker, but not other resources like space to learn or teaching materials.



Language Circles

Language circles (also known as language pods or language tables) are useful for helping learners develop their conversation skills.²⁶ Learners meet on a regular basis to practice having conversations in the language, usually with a mother tongue speaker.²⁷ Language circles may also include a mediator who ensures that everyone can contribute to the conversation and will guide people back into speaking Michif if they fall back into speaking English.²⁸

Language Learning Supports

Language initiatives and immersion teaching programs often require language learning supports that increase a community's capacity to run immersion programs. Language learning supports can include:

22) First People's Cultural Council, "Language Nest Handbook," (2020): 22-23.

23) Al-Bataineh, "Best Practices in Language Teaching," 2.

24) Al-Bataineh, 2-3.

25) Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle (P2WILRC), "Draft Report: Strategies to support Métis Nation British Columbia's development of a language revitalization plan for Michif languages in British Columbia," (2021): 4.

26) P2WILRC, 6.

27) P2WILRC, 6.

28) P2WILRC, 6.

Multimedia Documentation

Multimedia documentation is useful for communities that have limited numbers of speakers.²⁹ Through documenting and digitizing the language through audio files and videos, communities can help make hearing the language from mother tongue speakers more accessible for current and future learners.³⁰ Involving learners in the documentation process can also be beneficial for exposing them to language and encourage them to learn. Multimedia documentation is available to varying degrees for all three Michif languages.



Challenges of Immersion Teaching

For many Métis communities, a major challenge in creating Michif language programs is a lack of access to fluent speakers. To overcome this barrier, many communities and organizations are holding language workshops and classes virtually through online video classes. This makes Michif learning programs more accessible and increases opportunities to engage with fluent speakers. Technology can also help connect communities with speakers living in different regions.

Training for Indigenous Language Immersion

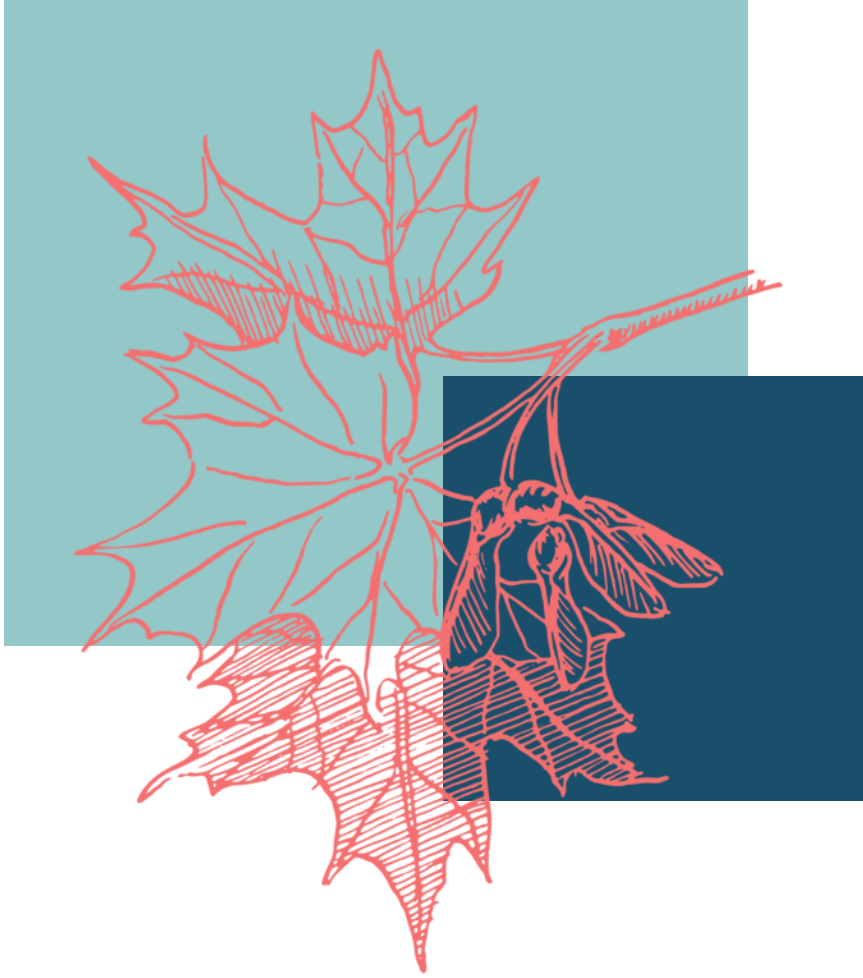
Language teacher training courses are important for supporting speakers and teachers setting up language immersion programs for the first time.³¹ These programs can help teachers structure lesson plans and create learning materials that are specific to an immersion program. Similarly, language learners can also receive training to better equip themselves with the skills needed for effective immersion learning. For more tips on getting started in immersion as a learner, check out the [First People's Cultural Council's BC's Master-Apprentice Language Program Handbook](#)

All types of immersion programs require the help of fluent speakers. Programs often also require other staff, including trained facilitators or teachers. Some of the programs require more resources, space, technology aids, and funding than others, making them less feasible for communities with less access to staff and funding.

29) P2WILRC, 6.

30) P2WILRC, 6.

31) Al-Bataineh, "Best Practices in Language Teaching," 3.



SECTION 5

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION CASE STUDIES

Many other Indigenous Nations across the world are on their own language revitalization journeys. While each Nation's language journey is unique, we can take inspiration from the Hawai'ians, the Māori and the Kanien'keha'ka who have worked extensively to ensure the ongoing vitality of their languages.

CASE STUDY OF HAWAI'I

In Hawai'i, the language revitalization movement has focused on creating community-led language programs, beginning with immersion programs for preschoolers, which were later extended into immersion elementary and secondary school programs.³² In addition to providing education for children, communities also created opportunities for parents of learners to learn the language so the children could speak it at home.³³ For communities without a large speaker base, speakers from other communities were brought in to teach.³⁴ Hawai'i expanded its efforts by creating an immersion

32) Kamana, Kauano, and William H. Wilson. "Hawaiian language programs." In Cantoni, G (ed). *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*. (Flagstaff: Centre for Excellence in Education, 1997): 153-156.

33) Kamana and Wilson, 153-156.

34) Kamana and Wilson, 153-156.

teacher training program, developing a system for curriculum development, and integrating technology, sports, and art into immersion school settings.³⁵ Hawai'i's language programming often looked to as an example for other nations working towards language revitalization.

CASE STUDY OF NEW ZEALAND

After the New Zealand government attempted and failed to create successful Māori language programming in schools in the late '70s and early '80s, the Māori community began to encourage Māori adults to learn the language from extended family members who were speakers.³⁶ In 1982, the first language nests were created to provide Māori language immersion in early education settings.³⁷ Language nests were completely immersive, with Māori being the only language spoken.³⁸ Shortly after the establishment of the language nests, a continuing Māori education program was created for graduates of language nests.³⁹ New Zealand has now seen the number of Māori language speakers increasing since the start of the language revitalization process and are working towards having one million speakers of Māori by 2040.⁴⁰



CASE STUDY OF KAHNAWÀ:KE, QUÉBEC

In the early '90s, the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center created a Kanien'keha immersion program for children.⁴¹ After recognizing that the children would be less likely to continue speaking the language after graduating from the immersion program if their parents could not speak it as well, Kahnawà:ke introduced an adult immersion program in 2004.⁴² The Kanien'keha language revitalization program in Kahnawà:ke also drew on technology to help promote language use outside of the classroom. This included creating television shows in Kanien'keha and partnering with a popular online second language learning program to create Kanien'keha-specific language lessons.⁴³ Through their efforts, the Kahnawà:ke community was able to reverse the trend of new generations speaking less Kanien'keha than the previous generation.⁴⁴

35) Kamana and Wilson, 153-156.

36) Rahma Ibrahim Al-Mahrooqi and C. Asante, "Revitalizing the Māori language: A focus on educational reform," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 20, no. 4 (2012): 1039-40.

37) Al-Mahrooqi and Asante, 1040.

38) Al-Mahrooqi and Asante, 1043.

39) Mahrooqi and Asante, 1040.

40) Te Puni Kōkiri, "Maihi Karauna: The Crown's Strategy for Māori Language Revitalisation 2019-2023," (2019): 12.

41) Grace Gomashie, "Kanien'keha/ Mohawk Indigenous Language Revitalization Efforts in Canada," *University of Western Ontario* (2019): 163.

42) Gomashie, 164.

43) Gomashie, 164.

44) Gomashie, 163.

SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES

The case studies of Hawai'i, New Zealand, and Kahnawà:ke illustrate how large-scale Indigenous language revitalization initiatives can and should be tailored to the unique needs and context of the communities involved. While there are similarities between their approaches that can be beneficial for other communities to adopt (i.e., focusing on programs that are community-led, targeting both children and adult learners through immersion, and integrating technology into language learning), each of the programs also were created with the unique context of their communities in mind and were molded to fit their specific needs.



SECTION 6

CURRENT RESOURCES AND WHERE TO LEARN

Please see below for resources and online courses for Michif language learners. For up-to-date information on language circles or courses in BC, please contact MNBC's Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Language at chl@mNBC.ca. For learners outside of BC, please contact your respective Métis provincial governing body or local.



ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Gabriel Dumont Institute Northern and Southern Michif Talking Dictionary and Apps.**

The Gabriel Dumont Institute offers [an extensive online dictionary with audio recordings](#) for both Northern Michif and Southern Michif for free. The dictionaries can also be accessed in app form.

- **Michif Language Facebook Groups**

There are several active Facebook pages and groups for Michif language learners. These groups are a good way to meet other learners and learn about additional resources.

- **Prairies to Woodlands' Southern Michif Course**

The Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle [offers a free, online self-paced Southern Michif course](#), and a speaking dictionary, in the Turtle Mountain dialect of Southern Michif. The course creators also offer support through an online Facebook group, where learners can interact with each other to put their conversation skills to use.

- **Samson LaMontagne** - is a Michif teacher who shares online resources and videos on his YouTube and TikTok accounts for Northern and Southern Michif. See below for the links to his YouTube videos and to his TikTok account.

- >> **Northern Michif Minute with Samson LaMontagne**
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRUK7BHZUVfoX1Np-2r5GI0P7fTvmJftA>
- >> **Heritage Michif Minute with Samson LaMontagne**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqY677cBUw8&list=PLRUK7BHZUVfrXDwmLrv37HKBzNg_E0_tg
- >> **Michif With Monok Samson TikTok**
<https://www.tiktok.com/@michifwithmonoksamson>

- **Southern Michif Audio Course and Elder Recordings**

Dale McCreery has created an [audio course for Southern Michif](#) available on YouTube that can support many of the other available resources. He also has a large collection of Elder recordings which he is able to share with learners through Facebook.

- **Speaking French-Michif YouTube Series**

The Louis Riel Institute's [Speaking French-Michif YouTube series](#) features clips of Elder Madam Patsy (Patricia Millar) working in an immersion early childhood setting.

PRINT RESOURCES

- ["Michif French as Spoken by Most Michif People of St. Laurent, MB"](#) by Dr. June Bruce, Dr. Agathe Chartrand, Lorraine Coutu, Patricia Millar, and Doris Mikolayenko. This is a textbook intended for beginner to intermediate learners of French-Michif/Michif French. The textbook, published in 2016 was created by Dr. June Bruce, Dr. Agathe Chartrand, Lorraine Coutu, Patricia Millar, and Doris Mikolayenko. **(French Michif)**.
- ["Piikishkweetak An Michif!"](#) by Nicole Rosen, Heather Souter, Norman Fleury, Grace LeDoux Zoldy, Verna DeMontigny. This textbook is a useful beginner learning guide designed for adults interested in learning Southern Michif and is available online for free. **(Southern Michif)**.
- ["Nêhiyawêwin Masinahikan: Michif*/Cree Dictionary "](#) and ["Nêhiyawêwin Mitâtaht: Michif ahci Cree"](#) by Vince Ahenakew. These dictionaries offer Cree/English translations into Northern Michif and a grammar guide for Northern Michif. **(Northern Michif)**.
- [Li Liivr Oche Michif Ayamiawina – The Book of Michif Prayers](#) by Grace Ledoux Zoldy and Louis Riel Institute. This prayer book consists of 16 translated prayers. **(Southern Michif)**.
- ["Road Allowance Kitten."](#) by Wilfred Burton, Christina Johns, Norman Fleury. This children's book is written in Michif and English. **(Southern Michif)**.
- ["Métis Christmas Mittens"](#) by Leah Dorion and Norman Fleury. This children's book is written in Michif and English. **(Southern Michif)**.
- ["The Giving Tree"](#) by Leah Dorion and Norman Fleury. This children's book is written in Michif and English and includes an accompanying narration CD in English and Michif. **(Southern Michif)**.
- [Fiddle Dancer](#), by Anne Patton, Wilfred Burton, Sherry Farrell Racette, and Norman Fleury. This children's book is written in Michif and English and includes an accompanying narration CD in English and Michif. **(Southern Michif)**.



FURTHER READING ABOUT INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

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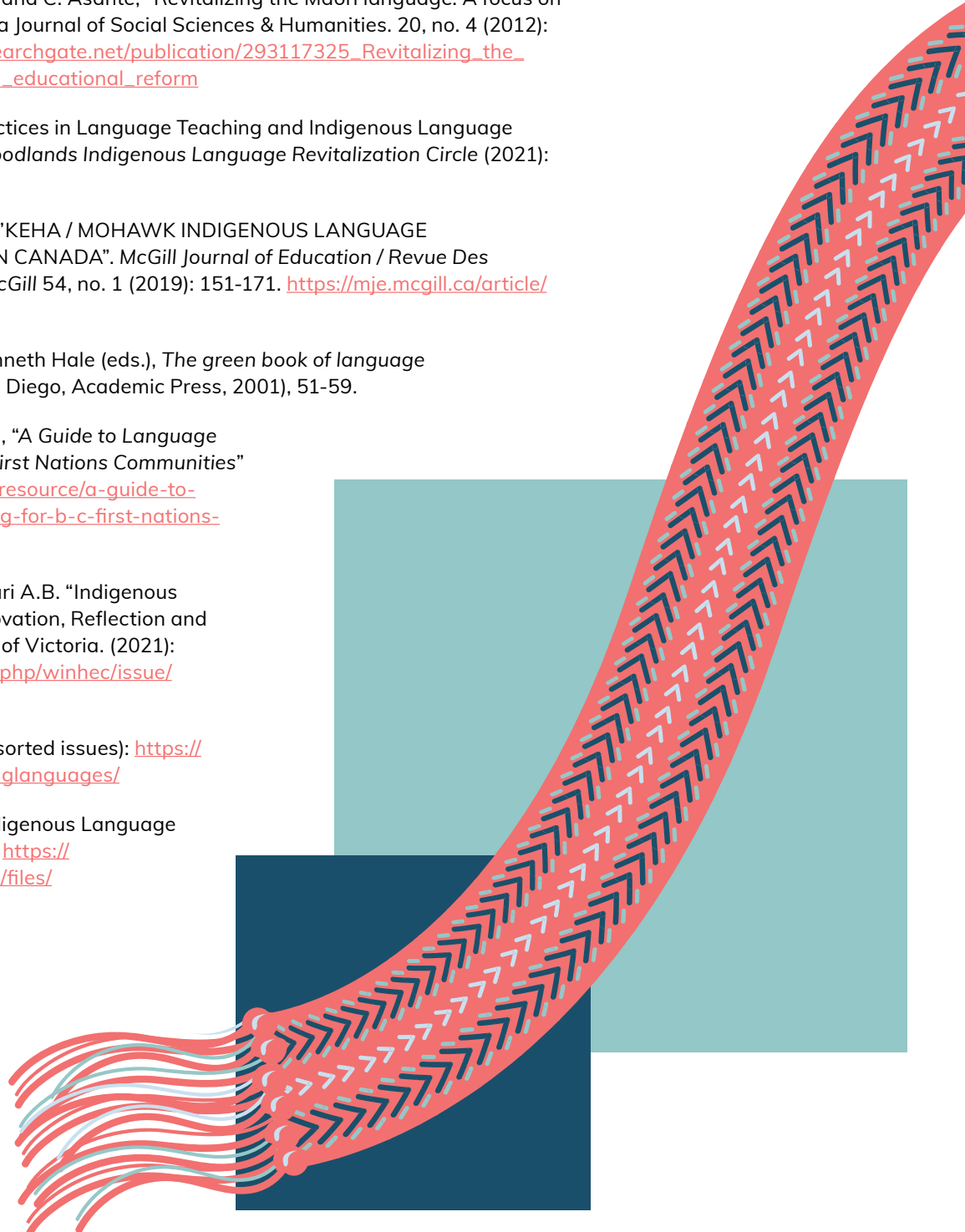
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Living Languages Journal (assorted issues): <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/livinglanguages/>

AILLDI's Grant Writing for Indigenous Language Revitalization Projects Guide: https://aildi.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/grantwriting_manual.pdf



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