



The Words of Our Ancestors:

Pocket Guide to the
Michif Languages



MÉTIS NATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Words of Our Ancestors:

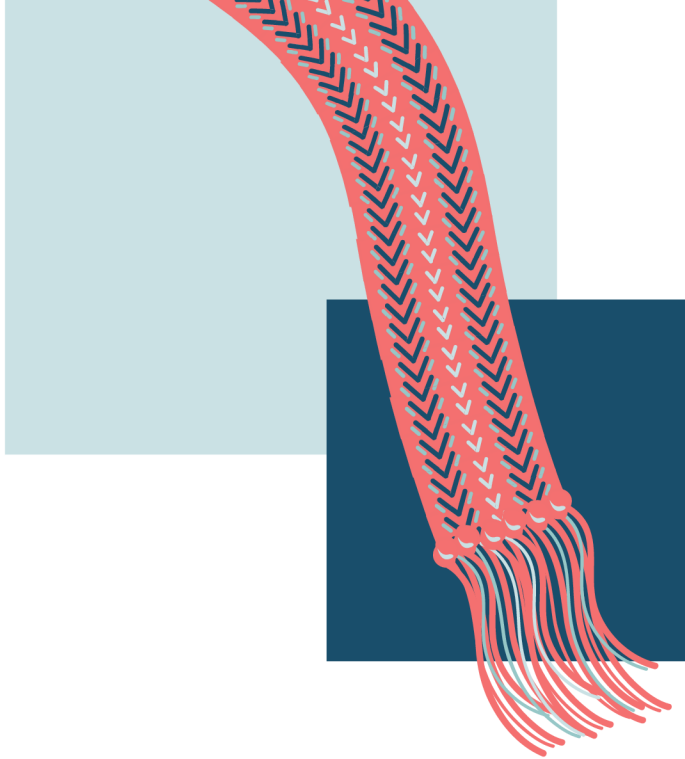
Pocket Guide to the
Michif Languages



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Michif French: Dr. June Bruce and Dr. Lorraine Coutu of St. Laurent, MB.

Southern Michif: Elder Norman Fleury of St. Lazare, MB.

Northern Michif: Elder Vince Ahenakew and Elder Ted Ratt of Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

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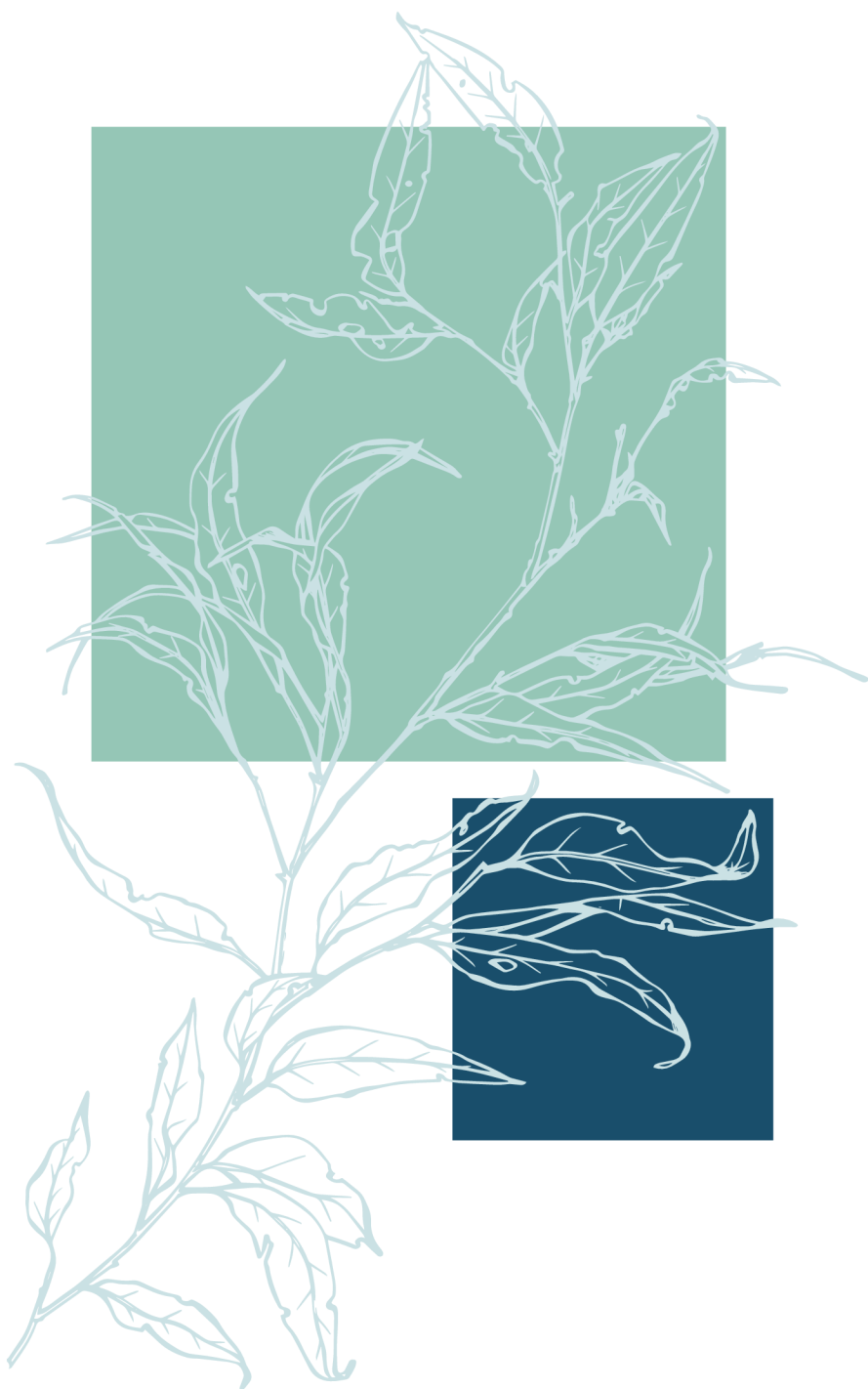


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How to Use This Resource

The following pocket version of *The Words of Our Ancestors* was created to teach simple and everyday phrases in all three Michif languages, providing readers with accessible and practical knowledge that they can use in their language learning journey.

The introduction provides a brief overview of the history of the Michif languages and the differences between them. Chapter 1 provides a short reference guide for how vowels and consonants typically sound in each language. Chapter 2 is a guide on how to create your own introduction. Chapter 3 consists of a list of common everyday sentences. The last section is a list of resources for additional language learning.



Introduction

The Michif languages are unique languages of Métis communities across the Métis homeland. The three Michif languages, commonly referred to as Southern Michif, Northern Michif, and Michif French, are made up of elements from both First Nations languages (Cree and Saulteaux) and European languages (French and English). In Métis communities, many people will use the term Michif to refer to one or all three of the Michif languages. Due to being forced to hide their identity, many Métis families have been disconnected from culture and language and are now reconnecting by learning a Michif language.

The Métis have historically been, and often still are, 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.¹ The Michif languages distinguished the Métis as a distinct group with an identity separate from their European and First Nations ancestors. Today, the word Michif is sometimes used by Métis people as a way to identify themselves as Métis.²

The origins of Michif French and Northern Michif are under researched. 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.³ Métis communities are spread out across Canada, and so there are localized dialects within each of the Michif languages that stem from different geographic regions.



Southern Michif uses mostly Plains-Cree verbs and French nouns, but also borrows nouns from English, Saukteaux, and Cree and is most associated with communities in southern Saskatchewan and North Dakota.⁴ 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. Northern Michif has historically been spoken in Northwestern Saskatchewan and Northern Alberta and may also be referred to as Michif-Cree or Île-à-la-Crosse Michif.⁵ Michif French is based on a Western Canadian dialect of French, with some Saukteaux and Cree words.⁶ Michif French has historically been tied to communities like St. Laurent and St. Eustache in Manitoba.⁷

Each of the three Michif languages have their own grammar, pronunciations, spelling, and vocabulary. There are differences in how words are spoken or written, depending on the community and speaker. 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 Michif, Northern Michif or Michif 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). 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. Up until recently, the Michif languages have primarily been oral languages, and thus 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 written Michif words and phrases.

1. 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.
2. Iseke, “Negotiating Métis culture in Michif,” 96; Bakker, *A Language of Our Own*, 52-53.
3. 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.
4. Bakker and Papen, “Michif and other languages of the Canadian Métis,” 5-6; Maria Mazzoli, “Michif Loss and Resilience in Four Métis Communities,” *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* no. 39 (2019): 98.
5. Mazzoli, 98.
6. Mazzoli, 98.
7. 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.

CHAPTER 1

Pronunciation Guide

This pronunciation guide is a quick reference guide with common sounds in Michif French, Southern Michif, and Northern Michif. It is not a comprehensive list of all sounds in the three languages nor do all sounds match the examples provided below – especially for words that are borrowed from other languages, like English.

Where certain sounds do not appear in English, a French example has been provided and marked with “(French).”

Michif French ⁸

Vowel/consonant	Sounds Like
a	“a” in “apply”
aw	“awe” in “awesome”
ay	“ay” in “pay”
e (short)	“e” in “pet”
e (long)	“ee” in “tree”
ew	“ew” in “flew”

Michif French

Vowel/consonant	Sounds Like
ewr	“eur” in “fleur” (French)
ey	“ey” in “they”
eyl	“ay” in “lay”
i	“i” in “loin” (French)
iył	“e” in “fille” (French)
o (short)	“u” in “hut”
o (long)	“o” in “omen”
ow	“ow” in “sow”
oy	“oy” in “joy”
oył	“ouille” in “bouille” (French)
u (short)	“u” in “nut”
u (long)	“u” in “clue”
y	“ee” in “tree”
ch	“ch” in “chase”
dji	“j” in “jam”
j	“j” in “juice”

8. This guide was adapted from: Millar, Patsy (Chartrand), Doris (Leclerc) Mikolayenko, Agathe Chartrand, June Bruce, Lorraine (Lavallee) Coutu. Michif French as spoken by most Michif people of St. Laurent, MB, (Winnipeg: McNally Robinson Booksellers, 2016).

Southern Michif ⁹

Vowel/consonant	Sounds Like
a	“a” in “apply”
aw	“aw” in “law”
ay	“ay” in “pray”
ae	“a” in “plan”
y	“y” in “why”
e	“e” in “let”
ee	“ee” in “tree”
eu	“eux” in “deux” (French)
i	“i” in “sit”
o	“o” in “low”
ou	“ou” in “fou” (French)
oo	“oo” in “pool”
oe	“oe” in “foe”
u	“u” in “nut”
g	“g” in “gape”
h	No English equivalent. When it comes after a vowel, it sounds like you’re going to make an h sound but you don’t “push” the sound out.
zh	“ge” in “beige”

Southern Michif

Vowel/consonant	Sounds Like
(aw)n, (ae)n	“n” in “coin” (French)
k	Soft “k” sound, closer to a “g”

9. This guide was adapted from: Fleury, Norman, *La Lawng: Michif Peekishkwewin: The Canadian Michif Language Dictionary*, ed. Lawrence Barkwell (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, 2000), 1-3.

Northern Michif ¹⁰

Vowel/consonant	Sounds Like
a	“u” in “nut”
i	“i” in “frill”
o	“oo” in “look”
e	“e” in “yell”
â	“a” in “water”
ê	“a” in “paid”
êy	“ee” in “feel”
î	“ee” in “feet”
ô	“oo” in “moo”
c	“ts” in “permits”

Northern Michif

Vowel/consonant	Sounds Like
k	“c” in “cap”
ᑭ	“g” in “gate”
j	“s” in “confusion”
ō	“o” in “operate”
rr	rolling “r” sound
ñ	Nasal sound when it comes after a vowel, like in French
‘	Elongates the sound that precedes it or combines the sounds of two consonants together

10. This guide was adapted from: Ahenakew, Vince. Nêhiyawêwin Masinahikan: Michif*Cree Dictionary. (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2009), ii.



CHAPTER 2

Introductions in Michif

This chapter covers common phrases to use when introducing yourself and your family in the three Michif languages.

ADI Phrase Search

Hear how the phrases in this guide are spoken by scanning this QR code, or by going to our website:
ameliadouglassinstitute.ca/michif-language



Language & Colour Key



a. Michif French translations by Dr. June Bruce and Dr. Lorraine Coutu of St. Laurent, MB.*



b. Southern Michif translations by Norman Fleury of St. Lazare, MB.



c. Northern Michif translations by Vince Ahenakew and Ted Ratt of Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

*For the Michif French phrases – where their translations differ, this has been demarked with their initials (JB) and (LC) for Dr. June Bruce and Dr. Lorraine Coutu respectively.

Introducing Yourself

Hello!

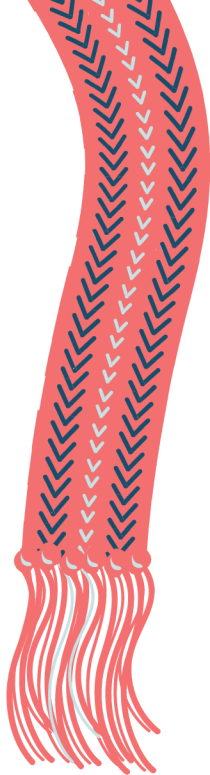
- ☐ a. Alo!
- ☐ b. Taanishi!
- ☐ c. Tân'si!

My name is ____.




- ☐ a. Mon non si ____.
- ☐ b. ____ dishinihkaashoon.
- ☐ c. ____ nisihkâson.

I am proud to be Métis!




- ☐ a. J'i fyayr d'eyt Michif!
- ☐ b. Ni kishtiitayimoon aen lii Michif wiyaan!
- ☐ c. Nimamihc'sin î âpihtaw'kosâniyân!






My family names are ____, ____, and ____.

-  a. Mi non di famiyl son ____, ipi ____, ipi ____.
-  b. Mii noon di faamii si ____, ____, pi ____.
-  c. Nîtsânak ____, ____, êkwa ____ isihkâsowak.




My ancestors are from ____.

-  a. Mi ansayt vyin di ____ (JB) /
Mi zanseyt sa vyin di ____ (LC)
-  b. Ma paraantii a ____ ooschiwuk.
-  c. Niwahkômâkanak mîna mô câpânak, ____ ohci.

I am from ____.

-  a. J'vyin di ____.
-  b. ____ dooshchiin.
-  c. ____ ohci niya.

I live in ____ now.




-  a. J'i res a ____ (JB) / J'i res a ____ astewr. (LC)
-  b. ____ ooma laa ni wiikin.
-  c. ____ êkwa niwîkin.






Listen to audio recordings of these phrases on our website:
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My Métis Chartered Community is ____.

-  a. Mon local si ____.
-  b. Moon local di Michif si ____.
-  c. Âpihtawkosân ocînâs kê ohciyân ____.

I live on the traditional territory of the ____ peoples.




-  a. J'i res su li teritwayr di ____ (JB) /
J'i res su li teritwayr tradjisyonel di ____ (LC).
-  b. Ni wiikin daan territwayr kayaash ooschi li ____
pi ____ li moond itagawiikichik.
-  c. Ôta niwîkanân aspin ohci awastaskamik ____
ay'sinowak.

I am learning Michif!




-  a. J'apren li Michif Fransay! (JB) /
J'i t'aprey aprend li Michif Fransay! (LC)
-  b. Nikishkaytayn li Michif!
-  c. Î ati kiskiyihtamân Kîwîtinohk Pîk'skwêwin – Michif!

Introducing Your Family




This is my mom.

-  a. Saw si ma mayr.
-  b. Ni mamaa awa / Awa ni mamaa.
-  c. Nimâmâ awa.




This is my dad.

-  a. Saw si mon payr.
-  b. Ni papaa awa / Awa ni papaa.
-  c. Nipâpâ awa.

This is my grandpa.

-  a. Saw si mon pepayr.
-  b. Ni mooshoom awa.
-  c. Nimoshôma awa.

This is my grandma.




-  a. Saw si ma memayr.
-  b. Noohkoom awa.
-  c. Nohkom awa.






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This is my kid.

-  a. Saw si mon enfan.
-  b. Awa moon aanfaan.
-  c. Nicawâsimis awa.




This is my spouse.

-  a. Saw si ma vyeyl (wife);
Saw si mon vyu (husband).
-  b. Awa kaa wiikimuk.
-  c. Niwîkimâkan awa.




This is my sister.

-  a. Saw si ma sewr.
-  b. Ma soeur awa.
-  c. Nimis awa (older sister).
Nisîmis awa (younger sibling).




This is my brother.

-  a. Saw si mon frayr.
-  b. Moon frayr awa.
-  c. Nistîs awa (older brother).
Nisîmis awa (younger sibling).




This is my niece.

-  a. Saw si ma nyes.
-  b. Ma nyayns awa.
-  c. Niscimis awa. / Nidosim'skwim awa.




This is my nephew.

-  a. Saw si mon nvu.
-  b. Moon niveu awa.
-  c. Nidihtkwatim awa.

This is my cousin.

-  a. Saw si mon kozin (masc).
Saw si ma kozine (fem). (JB) Saw si ma kozyn. (fem) (LC).
-  b. Awa ma koozinn (fem).
Awa moon koozayn (masc).
-  c. Mô kazöñ awa (gender neutral).

This is my Elder.

-  a. Saw si mon Elder.
-  b. Awa enn pleu vyay kaa kishkaytaahk (fem).
Awa aen pleu vyeu kaa kishkaytaahk (masc).
-  c. Môñ kihâtê'sînô awa.



Listen to audio recordings of these phrases on our website:
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CHAPTER 3

Everyday Phrases in Michif




This chapter covers common, everyday phrases in Michif French, Southern Michif, and Northern Michif.

ADI Phrase Search

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Language & Colour Key

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*For the Michif French phrases – where their translations differ, this has been demarked with their initials (JB) and (LC) for Dr. June Bruce and Dr. Lorraine Coutu respectively.

Greetings




Good morning!

-  a. Bon jowr! (JB) / bonjowr! (LC)
-  b. Boon matayn!
-  c. Tân'si, miyo kîk'sîpâyâw!




Good afternoon!

-  a. Bon apray midji! (JC) Bon aprey midji! (LC)
-  b. Bonn apray mijii!
-  c. Tân'si, miyo aprremidzi!




How are you? (To one person)

-  a. Komaw sa vaw?
-  b. Taanishi kiiya?
-  c. Tân'si kiya?

I'm well thanks, and you?

-  a. Sa vaw bin, marsi. Ipi tway?
-  b. Ji bayn, maarsii. Kiiya maaka?
-  c. Nimiyöyân, marrisî. Kiya mâka?




I'm not doing so well.

-  a. Sa vaw paw tro bin.
-  b. Namooya enn dohk ni miiyaayaan.
-  c. Nimâyâyân.






Talking about Others




How's your mother?

-  a. Komaw ki li ta mayr?
-  b. Taanishi ta mayr? / Taanishi ki maaaa?
-  c. Tân'si êkwa kimâmâ?




She's well. How's your family?

-  a. Y bin. Komaw ki li ta famiyl?
-  b. Miiyaayow. Taanishi ta faamii?
-  c. Miyöyâw. Tân'si êkwa kî't'sânak?




They're well (plural).

-  a. Y son bin.
-  b. Miiyaayaawuk.
-  c. Miyöyâwak.

Do you know Marie?




-  a. T'konay chi Marie?
-  b. Ki kishkayimow chiin Marie?
-  c. Kik'skîmâw cî Marie?

Yes, I know Marie.




-  a. Wi, j'konay Marie.
-  b. Wii, ni kishkayimow Marie.
-  c. Âha, nik'skîmâw Marie.

Dining and Eating




Have you eaten already?

-  a. T'a chi mawnji dijaw?
-  b. Ashay chiin ki miitshoon?
-  c. Sâsêy kê mîc'son?




Yes / no.

-  a. Wî. / No.
-  b. Wîi. / no.
-  c. Âha. / Möc.




Let's eat!

-  a. On vaw mawnji!
-  b. Miitshootaak!
-  c. Mîc'sotân!

Thank you for the food.

-  a. Marsi powr l'mawnji.
-  b. Maarsii poor li maanzhii.
-  c. Marrsî kê asamiyin.

This is delicious.




-  a. Saw si bon!
-  b. Wah, ooma wiikhashin!
-  c. Wihkasin ôma boy!






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Going Places




Where are you going?

-  a. Ivo t'en vaw?
-  b. Taanday itohtayen?
-  c. Tântî îwî itohtiyin?




I'm going to the park.

-  a. M'en vaw o park.
-  b. Daan li park neu itoohtaan.
-  c. Ôta anima park îwî itohtiyân.




I'm going to school.

-  a. M'en vaw a l'ikol.
-  b. L'ikol neu itoohtaan.
-  c. L'kwal îwî itohtiyân.

I'm going to work.




-  a. M'en vaw travayli.
-  b. Neu doo atooshkaan.
-  c. Îwî nidaw atoskiyân.

I'm going home.




-  a. M'en vaw a la mayzon. (JB) / minzon. (LC)
-  b. Neu atikiiwaan.
-  c. Îwî kîwiyân.

Leavetaking




Let's go!

-  a. Alon!
-  b. Shipwayhtaytaak!
-  c. Êkwa!




Have fun!

-  Have fun! (same as English)
-  b. La fun ayaa!
-  c. Môcikihtâ!




Be careful!

-  a. Fay atensyon!
-  b. Pishkaayhta!
-  c. Piyahatak!

Goodbye* / See you later!

-  a. Bye!*
-  b. Miina kaawaapamitin!
-  c. Êkosi ka wâpam'tin!

Goodnight!

-  a. Bon nwit!
-  b. Boon swayr!
-  c. Kîk'sîpâ ka wâpam'tin niwî kaw'simon!



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Where to Learn More

Michif French



Listen to this guide's phrases and more on
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Additional Resources:



*French Michif Dictionary: As Spoken by Most
Michif People of St. Laurent, MB.*

By Dr. June Bruce, Dr. Agathe Chartrand,
Dr. Lorraine Coutu, Doris Mikolayenko,
and Patricia Millar



Louis Riel Institute Video Series
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Southern Michif



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Additional Resources:



Gabriel Dumont Institute
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Southern Michif Dictionary



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Additional Resources:



Gabriel Dumont Institute
Northern Michif Dictionary



*Nêhiyawêwin Masinahikan: Michif/Cree
Dictionary by Vince Ahenakew*



Rupertsland Institute
Introduction to Northern Michif Course

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NOTES

