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ON COEXISTENCE AND CONVERGENCE
OF TWO PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS IN MICHIF

Donna Evans

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0. Introduction

The Metis are a heterogeneous people scattered in groups throughout Canada and the northern U.S. They trace their heritage to Indian communities which have had extensive long-term contact with French or English-speaking peoples, such as French-speaking priests and trappers during the 18th and 19th centuries, and more recently, English-speaking settlers and government officials (Douaud 1980:343). Typically, a Metis community is bi- or even tri-lingual; members speak their native language, (usually Cree) and either French or English.

One group of Metis migrated to the Turtle Mountain area of North Dakota. They speak Michif, a hybrid language which has developed out of the contact situation. It is unclear where this language originally developed. Michif is spoken by several hundred people as their native language, though most of these speakers are now over 40 years old (Rhodes 1977). According to Crawford (1976) Cree, French and Ojibwa are also spoken in the area. Although French was at one time the most prestigious language, many Cree and Ojibwa speakers learned Michif as a second language, Michif being more prestigious than Cree or Ojibwa. English is now replacing all of these; nearly everyone speaks English and the vast majority of young people are monolingual speakers of English. Michif verbs are basically Plains Cree with a complex, typically Algonquian affixation system, while all but a handful of nouns are of French origin.

It has been frequently noted that nouns are the class of words which are most often borrowed by one language from another. Bonvillain (1978) noted that in Mohawk the tendency is to create new words rather than to borrow them because of complex inflectional affixes. However, when borrowing does occur it is more likely to involve nouns, as the noun affixation patterns are not as complex as those of the verbs. This is also the case with Cree. The nouns do not have as complex a derivational and inflec-

tional affixation system as do the verbs. Michif has borrowed extensively from French and these nouns have retained their gender distinctions. Michif nouns have also been assigned the feature of [+ ANIMACY] in accordance with the Cree pattern, and verbs agree with the nouns in animacy but not in gender. When words are borrowed from English (all of which are nouns), they are assigned gender in accordance with the French system and animacy in accordance with the Cree system.

Michif has been described by Rhodes (1977) and Andrella (in preparation) as having two separate but coexistent phonological systems, one for the French vocabulary and another for the Cree vocabulary. Crawford (1976.6) says,

The division between the areas [French and Cree] is so sharply maintained that it seems almost as though there was a convention, a meeting at which an agreement was made to structure the Michif speech that way.

This, it seems, is rather unique among languages. In discussing language contact, Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968.158) note,

The study of languages in contact confirms the notion that stable long-term coexistence is largely an illusion, perhaps promoted by the existence of a relatively stable (or even dissimilating) lexicon and morphophonemics.

If two languages in contact over long periods of time are so likely to influence each other's syntax, semantics, and phonology, it would seem unlikely that a language composed of such a large number of borrowed words would not exhibit some interaction between the two systems. Fries and Pike (1949.41-42), working on Spanish loanwords in Mazatec say,

In the process of change from one phonemic system to a different phonemic system of the same language, there may be a time during which parts of the two systems exist simultaneously and in conflict within the speech of single individuals...it is impossible to give a purely synchronic description of a complex mixed system at one point in time, which shows the pertinent facts of that system; direction of change is a pertinent characteristic of the system and must also be known if one wishes to have a complete description of the language as it is structurally constituted.

Thus it is assumed that convergence will eventually occur, that having two separate systems is a 'marked' state of affairs and is unstable. Thus a language will either absorb the borrowed items into the old system or it will synthesize a new system.

In this paper I will present some of the evidence that has been used to argue that Michif has two separate phonological systems. I will also present evidence demonstrating that convergence is occurring, particularly

at the level of phonetically motivated rules. Let us proceed to look at some of the types of evidence supporting two separate phonological systems.

1. Evidence for two phonological systems

1.1 Processes originating in French

Michif French is similar in many respects to other French Canadian dialects. One prominent feature is the palatalization of /t/ and /d/ before high front vowels and semi-vowels. In Michif this has developed beyond mere palatalization to affrication (Douaud 1980: 397, Brent 1971):

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} t \\ d \end{array} \right\} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \check{c} \\ \check{j} \end{array} \right\} / \text{---} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{-cons} \\ \text{+hi} \\ \text{-back} \end{array} \right]$$

This gives the following Michif forms:

<u>French orthography</u>	<u>Michif pronunciation</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
le bon Dieu	[lI bõ jü]	'the good Lord'
petit	[pčIt]	'small'
samedi	[sʌmjɪ]	'Saturday'

This no longer appears to be a productive process in Michif, for words pronounced with high front vowels (which presumably originated from front mid vowels in French) occur which do not palatalize:

<u>French orthography</u>	<u>Michif pronunciation</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
demain	[dImæ:]	'tomorrow'
de l'eau	[dilɛ]	'water'

Thus it appears that the sounds /č/ and /j/ have become phonemes. (It should be noted that standard French does not have /č/ and /j/ as phonemes.) In Cree as well as the Cree component of Michif, /č/ is a phoneme, and only in a few morphologically defined situations is /t/ palatalized and fricativized to /č/, a process which occurred in Cree before the formation of Michif and which possibly influenced the French component of Michif.

The phonemic chart for Michif French is given below:

<u>Consonants</u>				<u>Vowels</u>				
p	t	k		i	ü	u		ĩ
b	d	g		ɪ				
f	s	ʃ	h	e	œ			œ̃
v	z	ʒ		ɛ		ɔ	æ̃	ã
		c		æ		a		
		j						
m	n	ɲ						
	l							
(ɹ)	r	y	w					

This chart is based on my field work and differs slightly from that of Rhodes. Items that he included which I have not found yet are parenthesized.

This may be compared to the standard French as given by Schane (1968:18):

<u>Consonants</u>				<u>Vowels</u>				
p	t	k		i	ü	u		
b	d	g		e	œ	o		
f	s	ʃ	h	ɛ		ɔ	ɛ̃	œ̃
v	z	ʒ		a		ɑ		ã
m	n	ɲ						
	l							
ɹ	r	y	w					

A common morphophonemic process in Standard French is that of truncation, which is composed of two separate processes, elision and liason. Schane (1968.1) describes these processes as follows:

Elision is defined as the suppression or dropping of the final vowel of a word before another word also beginning with a vowel sound... Liason, on the other hand, has been defined as the linking of a word final consonant before a word beginning with a vowel sound, the consonant otherwise being mute or dropped.

These same processes occur in Michif French as shown below:

Elision:

/lɪ um/	[lɪm]	'the man'
/la upital/	[lɪpital]	'the hospital'
/lɪ äfä/	[lɪfä]	'the child'

but not in:

/la tæb/	[la tæb]	'the table'
/lɪ frer/	[lɪ frer]	'the brother'

Liaison:

/liz are/ [li:zare] 'the ears'

but not in:

/liz liv/ [li:liv] 'the books'

/tut li zur/ [tʉlizur] 'all day'

Truncation does not occur in certain feminine constructions in Michif nor in Standard French. In Standard French there is often thought to be a mute schwa which survives in orthography but is only rarely pronounced. This schwa is apparently never pronounced in Michif but these words continue to be at least surface exceptions to truncation:

French orthographyMichif pronunciation

une grose feuille

[ɛn grʉs fay] 'a big leaf'

la petite fille

[la pčIt fi:] 'the little girl'

A result of these processes is that some consonants appear on the surface only when followed by words beginning with vowels. Because of this there is a tendency to reanalyze some words:

Michif pronunciation

[æ nɔm] 'a man'

[lɔm] or [lInɔm] 'the man'

[li:zɛf] or [æ zɛf] 'the eggs' or 'an egg'

(from the French les œuf 'the eggs')

Thus words beginning in a vowel are tending to become reanalyzed as beginning with a consonant, and which consonant they are reanalyzed as beginning with may depend on the frequency with which a particular article/adjective-noun combination is used.

There is no process of consonant truncation in Michif in Cree vocabulary or between Cree and French lexical items:

Amas dayan lI liv. 'I have many books'

La fi su liv kindawe:hte:n. 'Do you want the girl's book?'

Ni:kinak gi:yaya:n. 'I was at home'

Vowel nasalization is a process in Standard French which may be described as follows (Schane 1968:48):

- a. $V \rightarrow [+nas] / \text{---} \begin{bmatrix} +nas \\ +cons \end{bmatrix} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \#\# \\ C \end{array} \right\}$
- b. $\begin{bmatrix} +nas \\ +cons \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \emptyset / \begin{array}{c} V \\ [+nas] \end{array} \text{---}$

Thus according to Schane, nasal vowels are predictable in Standard French. It is not clear that vowel nasalization is productive in Michif (indeed, it may be argued that it is no longer productive in Standard French and that nasal vowels are phonemic (see Tranel 1981)). There are few alternations within the noun phrase of Michif where one could check for VN \rightarrow V. In a few cases, however, nasal consonants appear on the surface after a vowel and before a consonant:

- $\epsilon n \text{ ra}\check{s}$ 'a rock' (FEM)
 $\text{\textcircled{a}} \text{ fizi}$ 'a gun' (MASC)

The /n/ appears in feminine but not in masculine forms unless the word begins with a vowel as in $\text{\textcircled{a}} \text{ num}$ 'a man', in which case the article $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ remains nasalized. This again could be analyzed with the mute schwa in the feminine form but this seems rather abstract as no such schwa ever appears on the surface in Michif.

While some vowels followed by a nasal consonant in the Cree vocabulary are at times nasalized, the nasal consonant is not deleted. Cree itself does not have phonemic nasal vowels.

In the few cases where a nasal precedes a consonant in Michif French nasal assimilation occurs:

- $/\epsilon n \text{ p}\check{c}it \text{ fi}/ \rightarrow [\epsilon mp\check{c}it \text{ fi}]$ 'a little girl'
 $/\epsilon n \text{ gurnoi}/ \rightarrow [\epsilon ngurnoi]$ 'a frog'
 $/\epsilon n \text{ p}\check{c}ivu/ \rightarrow [\epsilon mp\check{c}ivu]$ 'calf'

This sort of nasal assimilation does not appear to occur in the Cree part of Michif as nasal consonants are rarely followed by another consonant. The following forms were elicited:

- tan ma 'which'
 tande 'where'
 pimbahtaw (from pimipahtaw) 'he runs'

In Michif French, as well as in Standard French, there is a process of vowel lengthening in word-final open syllables:

[la pčIt fi:]	<i>'the little girl'</i>
[lI pči: garsū:]	<i>'the little boy'</i>
[ɛm pčIsli:]	<i>'a little sled'</i>

Other examples are given below with the French spelling and the Michif pronunciation:

ventre	[vāt]	<i>'belly'</i>
bras	[bra:]	<i>'arm'</i>
voisin	[wezā:]	<i>'neighbor'</i>
maison	[mæzū:]	<i>'house'</i>
lune	[lün]	<i>'moon'</i>
cheveu	[zvü:]	<i>'hair'</i>

These forms do not show alternation between long and short vowels in Michif. In Cree there are phonemic vowel length distinctions and both long and short vowels occur in all environments. The following are Michif Cree examples:

ki:šikaw	<i>'it is day'</i>
gi:mi:yik	<i>'3P SG gave it(inan) to me'</i>
daya:n	<i>'I have it(inan)'</i>
kindawe:hte:n	<i>'you want it(inan)'</i>

Thus it can be seen that there are several phonological processes in Michif which are restricted to the French vocabulary and which do not affect the Cree vocabulary.

1.2 Processes originating in Cree

There are numerous morphophonemic rules in Cree, as in other Algonquian languages, many traceable to processes in proto-Algonquian. To name just a few, there is a process of t-insertion between a prefix ending in a vowel and a stem beginning with a vowel. This occurs in both Cree and Michif Cree which have the following forms:

[ayaw]	<i>'he has it(inan)'</i>
/ki + ayan/ --> [kitayan]	<i>'you have it(inan)'</i>
[apiw]	<i>'he sits'</i>
/ki + apin/ --> [kitapin]	<i>'you are sitting'</i>

Word-final /w/ is deleted when it is preceded by a consonant as in:

/pakamahw/ --> [pakamah]	<i>'hit!'</i>
/pakamahw + a:w/ --> [pakamahwa:w]	<i>'you hit him'</i>

Consonants

p	t	k	
	c		
	s	h	
m	n		
	y	w	

Vowels

i:	i	u:	u	i:=i:
e:				i =I
				e:=e: or æ:
	a:	a		u:=u:
				u =U
				a:=a:
				a =ð

(This data is from my fieldwork but agrees essentially with Wolfart's phonemes for Cree (Wolfart uses 0:/0 instead of u:/u)

In looking at the two parts of Michif it seems clear that the two phonological inventories are distinct. The French vocabulary has several consonants not appearing in Cree verbs, particularly voiced obstruents. The Cree vocabulary on the other hand has phonemic vowel length distinctions. Although some laxing may occur in the short vowels, the main distinction is that of length. In the French part, vowels appear to be more or less predictable as to length. There are also various morphophonemic and some allophonic processes occurring in one part of the language and not in the other. It is quite evident that the language has retained much of the parent languages, both in terms of phonemes and in terms of phonological processes. Nevertheless, since it is a single language and many people speak Michif as their native language with no knowledge of either French or Cree, it would seem that there must be some sort of phonological unity. Let us look at some of the evidence for convergence.

2. Evidence for interaction

2.1 Aspiration

Wolfart and Carrol (1973:9) state that in Cree, as in English, 'neither language recognizes a distinctive difference between p- sounds that are followed by a small explosion of air, and those that are not... this also applies for the sounds of t, c, and k.'

Rhodes (1977:23) also notes that Cree p, t, k, are optionally aspirated. Douaud, however, working in a Metis community in NE Alberta where Cree, French, and English are spoken, stated that in Plains Cree stops are unaspirated (Douaud 1980:399). The reason for this discrepancy is unclear. Perhaps Douaud's speakers were influenced by French or perhaps Wolfart's speakers were influenced by English. In any case, aspiration can be found in both the French and Cree parts of Michif optionally. This may be due to contact with English. All my language helpers, for example, have learned English in school as children and speak it fluently. Ricciuti (Léon 1968:124) notes that voiceless stops may be slightly aspirated for some

French Canadian speakers. Although it is difficult to determine the precise source of the aspiration, it is nonetheless present in both parts of the language. A couple of examples serve to illustrate this:

[si t ^h ʊt ^h]	'that's all!'	(from French <u>tout</u>)
[la t ^h æb]	'the table(FEM)'	(from French <u>la table</u>)
[k ^h i:pakamahæ:n]	'you hit it(PAST)'	(from Cree <u>ki:pakamahe:n</u>)

2.2 Vowel Nasalization

Michif has phonemic nasalized vowels in the French vocabulary. Wolfart and Bloomfield do not mention any nasal vowels for Plains Cree. There are, however, nasalized vowels in the Cree vocabulary of Michif. These vowels are not very frequent but do occur consistently in words such as the following examples, for which the Michif form and the corresponding Cree form are given:

<u>Cree*</u>	<u>Michif</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
o:hi	ũ:hĩ	'these(inan)'
anihi	anĩhĩ	'those(inan)'
ci:	čĩ:	QUESTION MARKER
-e:n	-ãn	PERSON MARKER on some TI stems

*These are from Wolfart (1973b).

Ojibwa, an Algonquian language closely related to Cree, has nasalized vowels. Bloomfield believes that they are all derived from underlying nasal consonants following vowels, especially long vowels. In sequences of /n/ plus /s, ʃ, ʒ, y/ the /n/ is often omitted and represented instead by a strong nasalization of the vowel (Bloomfield 1956:7-9). It is possible that Cree, being a closely related language, has this phenomenon also, although it is not clear that an underlying nasal could be postulated in all cases, either now or in the past. It is also possible that this could have occurred as a result of contact with Ojibwa speakers in the Turtle Mountain area, although there are no cognates of these particular forms in Ojibwa. Another possibility is that of spontaneous nasalization, as discussed by Ohala (1980.88):

It is a curious but significant fact that almost all such cases of 'spontaneous nasalization' involve vowels flanked by fricatives, affricates, or aspirated consonants i.e. consonants characterized by heavy air flow.

Ohala then postulates that the open glottis condition during vowel production

will create acoustic correlates that imitate those produced by nasalization when the vowel is flanked by consonants with heavy airflow. It is possible that these were indeed spontaneous nasalizations which, perhaps because of the French influence, have become standardized. It is difficult to tell without further information on other Plains Cree dialects, but it is interesting that these nasal vowels exist in a language that has borrowed so extensively from another language that has nasal vowels. One would not perhaps expect a language to add borrowed sounds to existing words but the fact that nasals already existed in the French vocabulary may reinforce a spontaneous change which had occurred in the Cree part.

2.3 Sibilant leveling

Another area that is suggestive of mutual influence is a phenomenon, noted by Rhodes, of sibilant leveling (Rhodes 1977:21). The following examples show this phenomenon as it occurs in the French vocabulary of Michif:

<u>Michif</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>French spelling</u>	<u>Michif gloss</u>
sɛs	šas	chasse	'hunt'
šaši	šaši	chassis	'window'
šɛs	sɛs	seche	'dry (FEM)'
šavaž	sovaž	sauvage	'Indian'
šɛž*	sez	chaise	'chair'

*Rhodes apparently didn't get this form. It's interesting that the change wasn't in the other direction i.e. to sez, as the general direction appears to be that of regressive assimilation in the other cases.

Pentland (quoted in Douaud 1980:399) notes that Proto-Algonquian */s/ and */š/ have merged in most Cree dialects to form a single phoneme whose pronunciation varies between the two. This includes Plains Cree. This merge has not yet occurred in some eastern dialects, but these have a sibilant assimilation rule operating in which an /š/ becomes an /s/ before another /s/. It is possible that at the time Michif was forming that a similar sibilant leveling process was occurring, causing the Michif Cree vocabulary to eventually have only /š/. The French vocabulary, while maintaining a four way distinction between /s/, /š/, /z/, and /ž/, also had the sibilant leveling process transferred to it in those cases where it was still operative. At present, */s/ and */š/ have completely merged in Michif Cree vocabulary.

2.4 Vowel reanalysis

The fourth area in which there seems to be interaction between the two languages is in the phonetic representation of the vowels. Cree has con-

trastive long and short vowels while French is usually analyzed as having vowel quality distinctions in terms of tense/lax. This is a very difficult area to venture into as the language itself appears to be in a state of flux and there is no earlier stage available for comparison, nor are the sources of the original dialects of French and Cree known precisely. Nevertheless, it appears that some reanalysis is occurring. It seems that the vowels in the French component of Michif are in at least some cases being reanalyzed as long or short vowels. Since all of the verbal and much of the adjectival and adverbial information is given in the Cree vocabulary there is not as much paradigmatic alternation information available to the Michif speaker as there is to the French speaker. An example in point is the distinction between the definite masculine singular article and the definite plural article: li and li: respectively. The distinction is mainly that of vowel length. In Standard French the distinction is that of tenseness, /lɑ/ versus /le/. /i/, /u/, /a/, and possibly /ü/ seem to be underlyingly long in many Michif French words where they would not be expected to be phonetically long in Standard French (i.e. non word finally and not before z, v, ʒ, r--see Brent, 1971:45):

<u>Michif</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>French spelling</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
[li: za:b]	[lezarbr]	les arbres	'trees'
[lI ka:fi:]	[le kafe]	le café	'coffee'
[a li:gli:z]	[a légli:z]	a l'église	'to church'
[æ:bu:le]	[æ bule]	un boulet?	'ankle'

More field work is needed, but it appears that the French vowels are falling into the Cree pattern, namely that of developing contrastive length distinctions. Another bit of evidence is that there is no clear distinction between /o/ and /u/ in the French vocabulary of Michif. In Cree there is only one back rounded vowel, which is somewhere between English /u/ and /o/ and takes the form of /U/ in most cases, although the quality varies. Douaud reports a 'widespread allophonic raising of oral mid and low vowels' as being typical of Metis French (Douaud 1980:401), most often affecting /e/ and /o/. In the dialect he studied, he found that the phonetic realization of /u/ and /o/, and of /e/ and /i/ merge consistently word finally and in fast speech in other locations as well. Again, more data is needed to determine whether this is occurring analogously in Michif.

3. Coexistence or convergence?

Looking at Michif, one is struck by the obvious dichotomy between the French and Cree elements. Unlike most other cases of borrowing, this language shows a massive and very orderly borrowing of nouns and adjectives. With this sort of categorial split, it may make it easier for speakers to maintain two separate sets of phonemes than would a situation where all categories of words had borrowed items. There is no question that the language is primarily Cree. The verbs dominate the speech flow; in discourse, speakers tend to use more verbs than nouns. Many verbs have attributive function and often the same thing can be said using a French adjective or a

Cree verb. The verb inflection system, while perhaps slightly simplified from that of Plains Cree, is still very active. On the other hand, instead of creating new nouns or borrowing them from French, it seems that speakers now simply borrow from English. No English verbs have been borrowed and only a very few French verbs have been borrowed. These include the French copula *il est* [Ile], and a few complement clause-taking predicates such as *žIpās* (from French *je pense* 'I think'/'it seems', *sI жүr* (from *c'est dur* 'it is difficult'), *saprā* (from *ça prend* 'it is necessary'), *pamwayǽ* (from *pas moyen*, 'it is not possible') etc.

la syel Ile blü	<i>'the sky is blue'</i>
saprā čipakamak lI garsü	<i>'he has to hit the boy'</i>
pamwayǽ čipetahk	<i>'he can't hear'</i>
žIpās muwew lI pwesü	<i>'(it seems) I'm eating fish'</i>
sI жүr čipimbahtaya:n	<i>'it is hard to run'</i>

With the possible exception of *žipās*, none of these predicates is inflected for person and number.

In addition to being morphologically, syntactically and lexically segregated into two parts, there is evidence that there is also phonological segregation. Much is gained in terms of explanatory power by positing two separate phonemic systems and little is gained in simplicity by attempting to combine them, as various phonological processes need to be restricted to one or the other parts of the language. Many of these rules are morphological rules which Cearley (1974) states are not expected to change or affect borrowed words. This would account for why t-insertion, w-deletion, and i-deletion do not affect the French vocabulary and perhaps also why elision and liaison do not affect the Cree vocabulary. Although the voicing of obstruents after nasals in the Cree vocabulary creates an allophonic variation between voiced and voiceless obstruents, if it were to apply in the French vocabulary it could potentially create a neutralization rule, since voicing is distinctive in French. The necessary environment of vowel-nasal-consonant doesn't arise very often in the French vocabulary because of the historical development of nasalized vowels in this environment with the subsequent deletion of the nasals. It does, however, occasionally occur:

En fai	<i>'a leaf'</i>
EmpčIt fi	<i>'a little girl'</i>
En cuyer	<i>'a spoon'</i>
tant	<i>'aunt'</i>

These phrases are pronounced as though they were single words. Although this environment occurs mainly in cases where the feminine indefinite article precedes the noun, it could cause some confusion by homonymy.

Although the two parts of Michif appear to be acting fairly independently, there is some evidence that a unity exists at some level. The Cree part of Michif shows evidence of French influence in its development of voicing contrast and the presence of some phonemic nasal vowels. The French part of Michif demonstrates changes in the phonemic inventory which are more Cree-like, including a tendency toward reanalysis of vowels both in quality and in length. There is also a tendency toward sibilant leveling which has already occurred in most dialects of Cree. More in-depth phonetic study would probably show little if any difference in articulation between the two parts of the language.

This has been a rather brief sketch of Michif phonology but two things seem apparent: 1) there is a definite distinction between the two components of the language, syntactically and phonologically; 2) there is some phonological convergence occurring. Further research on Cree and the French Canadian source dialect would be of help in determining the degree of convergence. More research on Michif itself is needed both to delineate more precisely the phonological processes which are occurring, and to compare the speech of those who have had differing contact with French and English, in order to assess the influence English has had on Michif. Unfortunately the future of this interesting language is in jeopardy because it is rapidly losing ground to English. Whether it would one day have reached a state of complete phonological convergence we may never know.

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