

Lips' Inking: Cree and Cree-Métis Authors' Writings of the Oral and What They Might Tell Educators

Susan Gingell

University of Saskatchewan

In this article the author argues that the varieties of English that Indigenous poets in Canada are bringing to the page indicate their concern to serve Indigenous peoples' purposes rather than worrying first and foremost about following the rules of standard Canadian English (SCE). Moreover, their language practice can thus be understood as a form of linguistic self-government. The article documents the mixing of Cree, Michif, and English languages in Indigenous communities and reviews evidence of how teachers are responding to this mixing. It then argues for acceptance of "Creenglish" and "Michiflish," linguistic hybrids of English and Cree and of English and Michif, the Métis language, respectively. It does so on the basis of evidence that Creenglish acts as a stepping stone to language mastery and because Indigenous poets in Canada are using these varieties of English in creative and politically important ways. After detailing the multiple functions that Creenglish and Michiflish are serving in the poetry, this study considers specific instances of use in the work of Cree and Cree-Métis writers Louise Halfe/Sky Dancer, Maria Campbell, Gregory Scofield, and Neal McLeod.

Toward Indigenous Linguistic Self-Government

Cree and Cree-Métis writers Louise Halfe/Sky Dancer, Maria Campbell, Gregory Scofield, and Neal McLeod use their own culturally specific Indigenous Englishes to record Indigenous experiences on the page, showing themselves focused on catching the rhythms, textures, and vocabulary—the sound and spirit—of how their people speak and the nuances of their thought rather than being focused on making their English conform to the rules of standard Canadian English (SCE). In doing so, they exhibit what I call linguistic self-government after reading what Stl'atl'imx poet-scholar Cole (2006) has to say about language in his poetically written scholarly book *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing: Coming Home to the Village*.

In this book, which Indigenizes both scholarly practices and academic English, Cole (2006) takes his readers on a verbal voyage through multiple contact zones of colonizers and colonized. In the process, he challenges Anglo-Canadian society's control over English through that society's textual apparatuses of dictionaries and grammars and the academic institutions through which the authority of these texts is principally realized.

As a non-Indigenous teacher-scholar of decolonizing literatures around the world, I acknowledge that I participate in the exercise of this

control despite my strong interest in how English has been Indigenized in multiple locations, especially in Canada, Anglophone Africa, and the Caribbean. Thus I was arrested when early in his book, Cole (2006) makes what seems to me a declaration of Indigenous linguistic self-government.

As a language person I do not acknowledge as ultimate authority of how I am to express myself "correctly" using english dictionaries lexicons grammarabilia and other imported colonialist paraphernalia who owns this english language to whom is it deeded chartered who has given the university the government the viceroy intendency over how documents are to be language over what counts as legitimate discourse within a sanctioned institution of post-knowing. (p. 23)

The rule-breaking and undeniably political stylistic choices that Cole makes in this passage are numerous. He uses white spaces rather than punctuation to signal the pauses that several speakers at the symposium *Celebrating the Local, Negotiating the School*¹ identified as characterizing Indigenous Englishes; he refuses the hierarchy of proper and common nouns by avoiding capitals except in the case of the pronoun I, which exception the persona tells Coyote is a way of avoiding a shape that disconnects head (the dot on the lower case *i*) from the rest of the body); and he creates the satiric neologisms *grammarabilia* and *post-knowing*. That he also makes a verb form of the noun *language*, turning it into a past participle, moves English closer to the more verb-based Indigenous languages (Fedorick, 1994; Ross, 1996; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Elsewhere in the book, Cole's practice of textualizing various forms of oral discourse and code-switching between English and the Ucwalmicwts language of his Southern Stl'atl'imx people as a mode of scholarly writing manifest his refusal to govern his tongue according to Anglo rules and conventions. The journey thus reanimates the autonomy of Indigenous people over how they speak and write, providing one libratory model of Indigenizing English.

Creenglish and Michiflish

A growing body of evidence suggests that such Indigenizing of English is increasingly occurring in the contact zone of Cree, Métis, and English cultures in Canada. One of the linguistic hybrids thus produced what literary critics and social scientists interested in language education in Cree communities have taken to calling *Creenglish*. The appearance of the word in an article in an online newspaper from a northern Ontario Oji-Cree community suggests that the word *Creenglish* has entered the vernacular too (Beardy, 2007). An examination of these sources makes clear that the hybridizing is happening from both Cree and English bases, some versions of *Creenglish* introducing English into predominantly Cree language use and others introducing Cree elements into predominantly English use. Scholarly documentation of linguistic hybridizing in this particular geo-cultural context is as yet thin and certainly not adequate for answering the question of whether *Creenglish* is an interlanguage or is

attaining the status of a pidgin or creole.² Thus I offer an expansive definition of Creenglish as any communicative practice that involves the mixing in a single verbal context such as a conversation, poem, or book of phonological, syntactic, or lexical features of English and Cree.

Linguist Bakker (2004) reports, "there are ... two languages called Cree ... the language spoken by First Nations in many Canadian provinces ... [and] the mixed Cree-French Michif language ... also called 'Cree' by its speakers" (p. 6), so it is tempting for the sake of economy to assimilate under the linguistic sign Creenglish the hybridizing of English and the Métis language Michif. Such assimilation would, however, be problematic both linguistically and politically. To call the language of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* and of some poems by Scofield (1996) Creenglish would both ignore linguistic facts such as that Campbell (1995b) writes the phrase "Ay tip aimsoot" (p. 26) to signify a Michif rather than Cree way of saying "He owns himself,"³ and obscure the importance of Scofield's inflecting the word *English* with French pronunciation when he imagines his foremother Mary asking, "How you say // in your Anglaish?" (p. 12).⁴ According to Bakker, the word Michif is also used to name "two clearly distinct languages," in this case "both spoken by Métis people in Canada and the USA" (p. 5), a distinct variety of French spoken in some Métis communities in the prairie provinces and the other a mixture principally of Plains Cree and Métis French (Bakker, 1997; Bakker & Papen, 1997). This latter version of Michif also shows traces of other Indigenous languages, chiefly the Saulteaux dialect of Ojibwe (Bakker) and derives its verb phrases, demonstratives, personal pronouns, and interrogatives principally from Plains Cree, whereas its noun phrases, including its articles and adjectives, come from Métis French.

When discussing the language of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* in a conversation with Hartmut Lutz and Konrad Gross, Metis⁵ translator Campbell (1995) used neither the word Michiflish nor Creenglish; instead, Campbell called the language *village English* (Lutz, 1991). Moreover, in the introduction to the translation of the stories of her people, she refers to the "dialect and rhythm of my village and my father's generation" (Campbell, p. 2). However, to name the linguistic hybrid used in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* and in Scofield's (2005a) poems like "Conversation My Châpan Mary Might Have Had with Mrs. Sarah F. Wakefield," I use the term Michiflish for a number of reasons. Whereas the creation of neologisms can be a scholarly affectation, the term Michiflish has the advantage of greater cultural specificity than Campbell's naming *village English*; allows for a more economical reference to the language than the description Campbell provides in her introduction to *Stories of the Road Allowance People*; has a breadth of reference that extends beyond the language of her book of translations to the work of other Métis writers; and signals recognition that Métis nations and cultures are distinct from those

of Cree peoples. Although Bakker (2004) reports in *What is Michif, and What is Called Michif?* that the term *Métis English* is used by Métis people to name one of the languages they speak, my reading of the Métis National Council's July 23, 2000, bilingual declaration of Michif as the official language of the Métis nation leads me to prefer the term Michiflish to Creenglish when referring to Michif-inflected English (Barkwell, 2004a, 2004b).⁶ In the English-language version of the declaration, a clause of the preamble ties the recognition of nation status to language: "within international law ... language is one of the requirements of the establishment or reaffirmation of Nationhood" (p. 1). Clearly, then, representing the English-Michif hybrid as Creenglish would flout the spirit of the declaration.

The evidence of writing in English by Cree and Cree-Métis people shows that Creenglish and Michiflish entail both (a) code-switching, that is, an often purposive moving in speech or writing between languages or linguistic codes such as standard Canadian English and any Indigenous English vernacular; and (b) employing nonstandard spellings designed to communicate Cree- and Michif-influenced speakers' pronunciation of English. Sometimes Creenglish will also feature calques, that is, loan-translations from another language (e.g., the English idiom *it goes without saying* is a calquing of the French *cela va sans dire*).

Two pedagogical questions arise from the existence of Creenglish and Michiflish: how have educators responded to the existence of such linguistic hybridizing in communities where Creenglish or Michiflish are being spoken and/or written, and what should the attitude to Creenglish and Michiflish be among educators who teach English, Cree, or Michif languages as they work to increase mastery in either language? I know of no documentation of the hybrid I call Michiflish beyond the creative works, but the slim extant documentation of Creenglish suggests that language teachers in formal school settings may have negative attitudes toward this hybrid too,⁷ despite guidance such as is provided in documents like Saskatchewan Education's (1994) *Language Arts for Indian and Métis Students: A Guide for Adapting English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*. This document first cites Goodman's (1987) assertion:

Children's language is as much a part of them as their own skin. Rejection of a child's language may be more disturbing than rejection of skin colour. The latter is only an insult, the former strikes at their ability to communicate and express their needs and feelings, their very selves. (p. 75)

Then the guide unambiguously stipulates in boldface type,

the students' first language should be utilized whenever possible to assist with understanding concepts, particularly during the emerging phases of literacy development. At the very least, the use of the students' first language should be encouraged and affirmed; students should develop pride in bilingualism as a positive asset. (Introduction, *ESL/ESD Students and the Language of Instruction*, para. 1)

Given the formerly "linguicidal" policies and practices of the Canadian state, however, sometimes the first language of Cree or Métis children will be not Cree or Michif, but a hybridized version of one of these languages mixed with English. Halfe (1998), for example, in speaking to interviewer Esta Spalding about what the latter calls dialect in Halfe's poems, says, "It isn't that I'm making fun of the language and our way of speaking English. To me it's very endearing. I love to hear my mother speak in thick Cree. The dialect is my mother's tongue, my mother tongue" (p. 44).

English professors' reception of Indigenized Englishes in literature has been understandably warmer than that accorded to such nonstandard varieties among language teachers because of their greater focus on literature and because literary writers have always exercised greater freedom to break the rules of English in order to create specific effects. Although to date literary critics have not to my knowledge recognized the use of a Michif-inflected English in creative writing, the use of Creenglish in literature has begun to be favorably acknowledged. For example, picking up on my use of Creenglish to name the hybridizing of Cree and English in some poems of Halfe's (1994a, 1994b, 1994c) *Bear Bones and Feathers*, another literary critic, Fagan (2007), used the term in her abstract for a panel presentation at the 2007 conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies.

Indigenized Englishes in Schools and Informal Learning Contexts

Although in this article I advocate for acceptance of Creenglish and Michiflish as legitimate communicative media, I wish to make clear up front that my advocacy is not meant in any way to displace the primary importance of revitalizing Cree (or *nêhiyawêwin*, as speakers of the language call it) or Michif. Neither is my advocacy designed to suggest that the teaching of acrolectal English, that is, the most prestigious social dialect of the language and the most widely understood, is in any sense unnecessary for successful functioning in the wider world given the reality of socioeconomic hierarchies and linguistic capital. I do advocate that when we as teachers encounter Creenglish or Michiflish in the speech or writing of our students, we ask ourselves how the nonstandard variety is *functioning*.⁸

This position, of course, begs the question of how teachers are to identify when a student is using Creenglish or Michif English. I would suggest in relation to this issue that teachers encountering any nonstandard use might adopt the practice reported to me by my colleague Aloys Fleischmann as the method used by Cree language instructor Billy Joe Laboucan when teaching students at the University of Alberta.⁹ "He would never say something was wrong," Fleischmann said. Instead, when a student made a mistake in saying something in Cree, Laboucan would respond by saying "Or ..." and then model how a fluent speaker would

say whatever the student was trying to say. (A. Fleischmann, personal communication, 7 March 2009).

Teachers who wish to contribute to a revival of Cree as a foundation for and a part of a larger renaissance of Cree culture or to a revitalization of Michif as part of the revivifying of Métis culture may have good reasons to avoid depreciating, and indeed to show respect for, Creenglish and Michiflish, just as teachers who wish to enhance students' ability to use an internationally readily comprehensible variety of English undoubtedly need to avoid such depreciation and demonstrate a respectful attitude to Indigenized Englishes. The reasons for such avoidance and demonstration of respectful attitudes include that Creenglish and Michiflish may serve as interlanguages, that is, they may provide a stepping stone to learning and ultimately acquiring fluency in the speaking and writing of *nêhiyawêwin*, Michif, or English. Moreover, the writing of authors with Cree and/or Métis ancestry demonstrates how Creenglish and Michiflish can be used in creative and politically important ways.

Yet indications are, in at least some Canadian pedagogical contexts, that the depreciation of such Indigenized Englishes is happening more often than the respect. Part of the reason is probably teachers' laudable desire to equip students to function well in the privileged lect, that is, SCE. However, also operational I believe, is a fallacy related to the users and uses of English that a leading scholar of *World Englishes* Kachru (1992) identifies in his article "Teaching World Englishes," namely, "that the diversity and variation in English is necessarily an indicator of linguistic decay; [and] that restricting the decay is the responsibility of the native scholars of English and ESL programs" (p. 358). By "native scholars," Kachru seems to mean those whose mother tongue is what linguists would identify as standard English. The fallacy Kachru speaks of has, he explains,

resulted in the position that "deviation" at any level from the native norm is an "error" [and] ... ignores the functional appropriateness of languages in sociolinguistic contexts distinctly different from the Inner Circle [i.e. those contexts in which Anglophone Whites constitute the linguistic majority]. (pp. 358-59)

Kachru's discussion grounds the position that if we ask how Creenglish or Michiflish is *functioning* in, or as, a student's communicative act rather than beginning with the assumption that any such use is a mistake in terms of acrolectal English, our pedagogy can contribute to decolonizing language practices and fostering the learning spirit in Cree and Metis students.

Such pedagogy would probably represent a significant shift in what has been recently happening in at least some quarters. In the final report of *The Language Mastery Project* in Manitoba, *E kakwe nisitôtamâk nisitôtamâwin: Making the Connection 'Learning and Understanding through Language,'* Dumas et al. (2005) report, "While post-secondary education

does not have a direct relationship with Aboriginal language mastery, it is related to positive attitudes about Aboriginal language use and negative attitudes towards the use of Creenglish" (p. 25). Yet Dumas also says, "Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated that they mixed English and Cree together in the same sentence some or all of the time" (p. 24). The same 74% thought that keeping their Cree and English separate was not sometimes or always preferable. The investigators also found the most negative attitudes to Creenglish among those with at least some university education.

These statistics suggest that postsecondary institutions may be directly or indirectly teaching students a bias against Creenglish. If such bias is being learned by university and college students, the result would be that a relatively powerful group in Cree communities, including those who become elementary and high school teachers, could well end up depreciating the linguistic practices of what the study samples indicate is most speakers in the communities where the research was done. Again, the goal of those instilling the negative attitudes may indeed be the worthy one of either revitalizing Cree/nêhiyawêwin or improving students' ability to function in acrolectal English, but we might ask whether the devaluing of language as it is actually spoken in contemporary Cree communities has positive or negative effects on children, and whether attitudes to Creenglish possibly learned in postsecondary institutions in some ways reproduce the former depreciation of Aboriginal languages under past colonial regimes.

Although an intuitive response to both questions may well be *yes*, they could only be definitively answered by oral testimony from Aboriginal communities and social scientific research.¹⁰ Because I am a literary scholar, I cannot provide answers to such questions, but I can argue for the political and aesthetic values of the code-switching, calqueing, and variant orthography in writing by contemporary Cree and Cree-Metis authors. In this way I am striving to make a case for the acceptance of Creenglish and Michiflish as legitimate communicative media.

Before turning attention to the writing of the oral in Canadian literature, however, I present evidence that Creenglish, whatever else it may be doing, is already functioning as a stepping stone to learning or relearning Cree. Beardy (2007) of the Muskrat Dam First Nation, writing about why she is proud to be Aboriginal, recounts a sense of shame for having lost the Oji-Cree in which she was fluent as a child, but goes on to exult about her fluency in Creenglish.

When I was a child, my first language was Oji-Cree. My parents have videos of my sibling and I speaking away, or actually arguing in our native tongue. Now, I can't even put more than [sic] three words together without it coming out all jumbled together. It makes me feel "broken" and ashamed that I lost language. It's like losing a part of myself, a part of me that was so vibrant as a child.... I am slowly learning how to speak again, although I am

proud to say I can read and write pretty well. But I sure can speak “Cree-nglish” perfectly! (p. 1)

Beardy’s remarks indicate that in cases of mother-tongue language loss of Cree, fluency in Creenglish can provide speakers with a feeling of pride in their linguistic abilities, a pride that may help secure skills in the target language. However, if Creenglish is depreciated by those in positions of authority, it is less likely to be a workable basis from which English-speakers can build fluency in Cree or Cree-speakers can increase fluency in English.

The draft Alberta Education (2006) curriculum document *Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation: Grade 10 to Grade 12* is the only curriculum document I have been able to find that recognizes Creenglish by name, and in a section headed “Creative and Aesthetic Purposes” asserts that students might benefit by “examine[ing] the concept of Cree/English=Creenglish—a combination of Cree and English” (p. 227). It then offers the following sentence to explain by way of example what it understands Creenglish to be: “niwî nitawî gasowin nicarim” (“I am going to get gas for my car,” p. 227). In this case, Cree is clearly the first language into which English words are being introduced and assimilated. In the writing of contemporary Cree and Cree-Metis poets whose work I examine for evidence of politically powerful and creative uses of Creenglish and Michiflish, the base language is English, and Cree or Michif words, phrases, sentences, and syntax are introduced to serve a variety of functions.

Creenglish and Michiflish in the Work of Indigenous Poets in Canada
Among the multiple functions of Creenglish and Michiflish in this poetry are these lects serving:

1. to proclaim identity and mark both cultural differences and the contemporary presence of Cree or Cree-Metis people in their traditional territories where English discourse largely effaces this presence, and the dominant culture can make Indigenous people and their languages now seem alien;
2. to differentiate primary and secondary audiences for the work;
3. to recognize the inevitably hybrid condition of contemporary life in these territories;
4. to satirize colonial and neocolonial institutions and behaviors, thus having fun with Creenglish and Michiflish while attempting to effect change;
5. to indicate the intimate connections of Cree and Cree-Metis people to the land and to each other;
6. to maintain cultural appropriateness when using English, whether in representations of Cree and Cree-Metis people and their ceremonies or in ensuring the *survivance*¹¹ of oral traditions by textualizing them

in print while also signaling the ongoing importance of the oral in Cree and Cree-Métis cultures; and

7. to serve as a way of coming home to self and community, and therefore of claiming kinship.

In addition, in the case of some uses of Creenglish, authors use this variety of English to signal a resurgence of Cree culture and its place in modernity and the future.

The use of Indigenized Englishes in contemporary Cree and Cree-Métis poetry provides plenty of evidence to support the Alberta curriculum (1992) writers' contention that Creenglish—and I would argue by extension Michiflish—can be used in creative and aesthetic ways that respond to what Trinidadian-Canadian writer Philip (1989) refers to as “the anguish that is english in colonial societies” (p. 11). The use of one or both of these linguistic hybrids in the poetry of Halfe, Campbell, Scofield, and McLeod offers models of imaginative language practice that can have positive effects in enhancing the prestige of Cree and Michif languages and peoples and in making English more accommodating of Cree and Cree-Métis world views. These effects include challenging the stereotypes associated with nonstandard English use among contemporary neocolonized and hegemonic groups alike; offering a dignified, decolonizing alternative to “Tonto talk” (Womack, 2000, p. 155) or “cigar store dialect” (Littlefield, cited in Womack); and potentially persuading people of the power of mixing codes while honoring the linguistic realities of Indigenous peoples everywhere following the European Imperial era.

In this way, imaginative writers bringing their people's speech to the page in what I call *lips' inking* works in a vein different from, but parallel to, that of professional sociolinguists studying Englishes. Working in the variationist paradigm founded in the work of sociolinguists Labov (1969) and Trudgill (1983; 2004), books like Kachru's (1992) *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*, and articles in the journal *World Englishes* have for years argued explicitly or implicitly that we need to recognize that what was once thought of as a decidedly singular “proper English” (Crowley, 1991, p. 8) should in fact be understood as just one variety of English, itself changeable over time, and no more grammatically correct than any other used widely by a cultural group.

However, such revaluation of varieties of English spoken and written in decolonizing contexts is a project that has thus far not gained much purchase in how most Canadian educators think about language. As a group we are still much invested in defending standard English, but we might be given pause by the knowledge that the word *standard* in the term *standard English* links the term to the idea of a coercive imposition. The etymology of *standard* is rooted in the name for the military pole with identifying forms or symbols used both to indicate to soldiers where they should gather and stand and to mark the point from which commands

were issued. In later related use, the word *standard* signified a rallying point for armies or navies. Max Weinreich's aphorism that "a language is a dialect with an army and navy" (cited in Childs, 2008) thus chimes well with the concept of standard language.

When one variety, or lect, of a language is elevated to the status of a standard, skill in its use provides the speaker with what French sociologist Bourdieu (1991) calls linguistic capital, that is, the socioeconomic profit a person derives from being able to use the privileged lect proficiently. In the Canadian context, Anglo-Canadian English is the privileged lect, that with the most linguistic capital, and Aboriginal varieties of English are often depreciated and devalued. However, when poets code-switch between languages like English and Cree and between linguistic codes such as standard and Cree-inflected English, they enhance the linguistic capital of Cree and Creenglish and tap into *mamâhtâwisiwin* (McLeod, 2007b). This is the power and the "great mystery" that Cree poet-scholar McLeod (2007a) explains is "a central process of Cree consciousness and knowing.... and important in articulating a Cree concept of land" (p. 30) because *nêhiyawêwin*—"the process of making Cree sound"—links Cree people to the land. By using *nêhiyawêwin* in a predominantly English-language poem that represents contemporary Cree experience, then, Cree poets writing out of their peoples' traditional territory also serve notice to Anglophones that this land was and continues to be *nêhiyawaskiy*, Cree land. Yet as Edwin Tootoosis told the young McLeod, "*môy ê-kistawêt*—it does not echo" (p. 6) as it did before the advent of invader-settler peoples from Europe and the imposition of their names on the landscape.

Louise Halfe's Use of Creenglish

The greatest sense of the land being again made to echo with the sound of *nêhiyawêwin* in Louise Halfe/Sky Dancer's (1994a) first book *Bear Bones and Feathers* comes in the poem "Sister," which concludes from the brutal, fatal abuse of an Aboriginal woman the need for healing among the *nêhiyawak*. More than half the poem is constituted by a transcription of the words of a Cree morning song to rouse her people to healing themselves, so that the speaker is strongly identified with the *nêhiyawak*, whereas readers who do not understand the language are positioned as outsiders who must have recourse to a glossary at the end of the book to grasp the meaning of the extended passages of *nêhiyawêwin*. Here the use of Cree serves a ceremonial function signaled also by the circular nature of the words' movement as the opening stanzas are repeated at the end of the poem.

Pasikok, pasikok

Pehtaw, pehtaw

Kisimsinow pikiskwew

*Akosiwak aisiyiniwak
Piko matotsanihk ta pimatisiyahk
Kipa kiwek*

Race with your spirits
Kakisimotak, to heal, to heal.

*Iskwew atoskewin kimiyikonaw.
Kakweyahok, kakweyahok.*

*Pasikok, pasikok
Pehtaw, pehtaw
Kisimsinow pikiskiyew [sic?] ... (p. 93)*

The extensive use of Cree in this poem is a signal of the primary audience to whom the poem is addressed,¹² but there is also the sense that *nêhiyawêwin* is the language of the heart, of intimacy, of what LaRocque (1991) calls "soul language."

However, in the opening lines of the poem, "In the morgue *e-pimisik*,/on a steel table" (Halfe, 1994c, p. 93), the one word of Cree surrounded by English words not only reproduces the effects of the attempted "linguicide" the colonizers practiced, but also the *nêhiyawâk* refusal to let their language die. The first line features the isolated Cree word meaning "she lay," thus suggesting that the woman is lying in a foreign environment as a result of being denatured by violence tied to the colonizers' culture by the synecdoche of the work boots that trampled her and the beer bottle that has been used to rape her. At the same time, the code-switch to Cree signals that despite the linguistic violence, Cree language continues to be used and Cree people continue to claim each other as kin.

In her book-length genealogical poem *Blue Marrow*, Sky Dancer (Halfe, 2004) acknowledges that the land no longer echoes as it once did without ceding either Cree geographical, linguistic, or spiritual territory. She does so by using English as the primary language of her poem, but then inserting Cree insistently into her text even in reciting some of the English language's most sacred texts. In this way, she disrupts the uniform governance of the Imperial language with an English-Cree hybrid discourse as she re-tenures Cree spirits.

*Glory be to okâwîmâwaskiy
To the nôhkom âtayôhkan
To pawâkan
As it was in the Beginning,
Is now,
And ever shall be,
World without end.
Amen. Amen. (p. 1)*

[Mother Earth]
[my Grandmothers]
[Dream Spirit]

Code-switching of this kind represents "the power to own but not be owned by language" that Pratt (1993) identifies as a characteristic of ethnonationalistic writing and the phenomenon of transculturation.

Not all Halfe's (2004) code-switching is necessarily ethnonationalistic, however. Sometimes she is as concerned to signal her hybridized identity and that of other Indigenous people following interaction of intimate as well as cultural and economic kinds in the context of the fur trade that is central to the book. Among the *acimowinis*/little stories that this praise-singer gathers into the medicine story bundle that is *Blue Marrow* is one in which the speaker in the poem identifies herself as a chameleon—a creature that changes color as a form of protective adaptation to new environments—and her children and grandchildren as culturally hybrid. When she lists family and things that make up the fabric of contemporary urban Aboriginal life, she encodes the protective hybridity of her condition, and by extension that of other contemporary Aboriginal people.

A chameleon. Round dancing,
the Give-Away. I lift my feet.
For Usne Josiah. Omeasoo Kirsten Marie.
Josiah Kesic. Alistair William Aski. (p. 65)

Like the multilingual names of Halfe's grandchildren Josiah Kesic and Alistair William Aski, the names of her children Usne Josiah and Omeasoo Kirsten Marie are polyglot.¹³ Usne is a lay phonetic transcription of the Cree word for rock, *asiniy*, and Josiah is Hebrew in origin, whereas *omiyasiw* (Omeasoo) is Cree for the beautiful one, Kirsten is Scandinavian, and Marie French. The names are thus a means by which the little story functions as synecdoche for the hybrid condition of people and cultures in the traditional Cree territory of the present day. In such circumstances, a linguistic hybrid such as Creenglish is obviously appropriate to the cultural circumstances about which Halfe writes.

Sometimes Halfe marks traditional Cree territory, not with *nêhiyawêwin* itself, but with a textual simulation of the voice of a *nêhiyaw* speaking English. Halfe transcribed what readers might think of as the broken English of these poems in order to invest this mode of speech with dignity by putting it into a poem, a culturally prestigious genre in the Western context (Gingell, 1998). Moreover, as Halfe (1998) told Spalding when she was a social worker with First Nations women, she heard again the Cree-accented English that her mother spoke and wanted to use it in her poems because of its connotations of maternal love.

Halfe's explanation of her motivation for using dialect is remarkably close to one of the reasons Jamaican poet Louise Bennett offered for using in her writing Jamaican dialect, or what Brathwaite (1984), convinced that "caricature speaks in dialect" (p. 13), would call the nation language of Afro-Caribbean people. In the TV Ontario video, Bennett (1990), Miss Lou reports that the idea that Jamaican Creole was bad seemed to her utterly unconvincing because the people around her, who were "nice, nice people," were speaking this language. The intimate associations of the language were key in recommending Creole to her as a poetic medium:

"You can express yourself so much more strongly and vividly than in standard English." For Halfe, as for Bennett, the challenge was to find imaginative strategies to simulate in print the everyday talk of community members and to increase the linguistic capital of their respective depreciated lects.

However, in Sky Dancer's poems "Der Poop" (Halfe, 1994a) and "My Ledders" (1994b), Creenglish is instrumental in satirizing colonial institutions and neo-colonizing behaviors while playing with language in a way that Acoose and Beeds (2005) refer to as "Cree-ativity." "Der Poop" takes the form of a poetic letter to the Pope on one occasion of his expressing sorrow about what had happened to Aboriginal people in Catholic institutions. In the letter, Halfe uses body-based humor to transform "Dear Pope" into "Der Poop," her variant spelling of *pope* initiating the line of scatological diction and imagery that runs as a satiric current through the poem. The First Nations woman composing the letter chooses to write on newspaper from the outhouse, thereby suggesting that she is less aligned with those of her "indian friends" who say the apology is good (p. 102) than with those who "say you sorry don't walk" (p. 102). The latter phrasing, which exhibits what Kachru (1983) refers to as the bilingual's creativity, would be an unusual formulation for a standard English-speaker. Probably, therefore, a calque on a Cree idiom, the phrasing is certainly a memorable way to suggest an apology with no real legs, no power to get around and convince people of genuine contrition. The satirical force of the scatological diction and imagery in this poem is sustained through puns such as the letter-writer's exclaiming, "say, i always want to dell you stay/out of my pissness" (p. 102). The pun here is enabled by the Creenglish of the poem's speaker, which reflects the Cree sound written as *p* but in speech sounded more like the English *b*.

In "My Ledders" (1994b), another of Halfe's epistolary poems written to the Pope, her choice of words and her spellings are again part of her meaning-making and political strategies.¹⁴ A white therapist who is appropriating and commodifying sweatlodge ceremonies is called a "darafist" (p. 103) to suggest the violence he is doing, and in Halfe's explaining why this behavior is so objectionable, her diction, lineation, and orthography combine for maximum satiric effect.

i don't dink you like it
if i dook you
gold cup and wine
pass it 'round our circles
cuz i don't have you drainin
from doze schools. (p. 103)

By choosing the word *training* rather than *education*, *instruction*, or the more Cree-specific diction *teachings*, and by breaking the line after *drainin*, thus placing the word in the most emphatic position in the line, Sky Dancer communicates the idea that residential schools drained Cree cul-

ture out of its students. The reference to “doze schools,” lacking an antecedent for the Creenglish adjective for *those*, seems chosen to suggest wryly a pedagogy and curriculum that sent students into a kind of sleep, both a doze of boredom because of the alien form of instruction and a doze in terms of being alive to the students’ Cree culture.

Michiflish in Maria Campbell’s Stories of the Road Allowance People

Cree-Métis culture is brought alive through the vernacular voice that speaks from the pages of Campbell’s (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Campbell told Hartmut Lutz and Konrad Gross in a formal conversation that although she would have loved to be able to preserve the stories in the Cree and Michif languages in which they were originally told, this was not possible: “I can’t write in our language, because who would understand it?” (Campbell, 1991, p. 48). When I asked her in an interview what made her put the stories of her people on paper, she revealed that the impulse to translate came from

my father telling me a story [in Cree] and my daughter walking in and wanting to know what was so funny. I remember thinking after I’d translated for her that my children would never hear these stories. I think that was the first time I thought I should be translating and publishing stories. (p. 188)

When she found that translating the stories into “‘proper’ English” left “a critical element missing” (p. 189), she became convinced that it was rhythm that was lacking because “the soul of a story, the heart, is associated with rhythm” (p. 189). Only when listening to her father tell stories to her children in Michiflish did she realize that she needed to tell these stories in “the voice and rhythm of his generation” (p. 190). Although from the point of view of prescriptive grammarians this language would seem “very broken English” (Lutz, 1991, p. 48), she learned in working with it that it was “very beautiful ... very lyrical” and allowed her “to express [her]self much better” (p. 48) than did standard English. The further advantage she reports is that “I can also express my community better than I can in ‘good’ English. It’s more like oral tradition, and I am able to work as a storyteller with that” (p. 48). That Campbell ironizes “good English” here points to the fact that for her purposes, for the functions she needs English to serve in textualizing Métis stories, Michiflish is the superior lect.

Using the vernacular and capturing the rhythms of the storyteller by lineating the text as poetry, Campbell translates and transcreates the oral storytelling experience onto and through the page. I say *through* as well as *onto* because the variant orthography of the text pushes readers to decode the written text through sounding out the words on the page. This reoralizing in order to work out what some of the sequences of letters not readily recognizable as English words in fact mean is exemplary of the survivance of Cree-Métis culture. For example, when Campbell (1995a) textualizes the storyteller of “Big John” as saying “Gorsh/me I jus can

member dat little girl hees name./Boy me/I'm getting bad for dat you know" (p. 67), the challenge to silent reading practices that depend on visual recognition of words is clear, and the silent reader is transformed into reader/listener/speaker. The privileging of the ear over the eye, which suggests the centrality of orality in the culture that produced the story, becomes clear when readers realize from sounding out the words and taking context into account, the word *can*, like the word *jus*, lacks the *t* that would make the passage visually easy to read. This privileging of oral over written is particularly evident when the sequence of letters on the page is a signifier for a standard English word as, for example, *can* and *member* are in this passage. Yet another way that the text suggests an Indigenous speaker is through the reduplication in such structures as "*Me I jus can member*" and "*dat little girl hees name*" (emphases added, Campbell, 1995a), reduplication being a feature of both Cree and French and, therefore, of Michif (Ahenakew & Wolfart, 1983, p. 369). Through such means Campbell indigenizes the English grapholect, the standard written version of the language, to reflect the Indigenized English of Cree-Métis (and Cree-Métis) speech communities.

The aesthetic of decorum—that is, using a language appropriate to speaker and subject matter—further explains the use of Michiflish in Campbell's (1995b) textualizing of Cree-Métis oral traditions. A sense of oral storytelling is created at the outset of "Dah Song of Dah Crow" through the opening formula, which is the oral equivalent of a title, "I'm gonna tell you about," and the narrator's revealing that his knowledge of Crow came chiefly from stories, "I heerd lots about him over dah years" (p. 14). The text further simulates oral storytelling by directly addressing the listening audience as *you* and reacting through exclamations to implied signs of reader/listener disbelief. The conclusion of the following description of Crow, for example, reflects audience incredulity: "You know/dey even say dat man he can talk to dah eagles./Dats true!" (p. 15). By using an Aboriginal vernacular to textualize Métis oral traditions, Campbell is, like Cole (2006), refusing the authority of colonialist language paraphernalia that "prescribe how a document is to be language" (p. 23), and the eye vernacular¹⁵ that Campbell employs can be read as her linguistic response to the situation summed up in the lines "Me I was scared we was turning white/but a few years ago/dah times dey start to change" (p. 14). By "Michif-izing" the white man's English to create Michiflish, Campbell makes convincing the claims that the Métis have begun to reverse the trend to whitening and that the carriers of her people's traditional culture are indeed "starting to come back again" (p. 14).¹⁶ Moreover, as Anishinaabe poet-publisher Akiwenzie-Damm (2005) has written, Campbell's language practice in this book "has influenced the thinking and writing of many First Peoples writers and marked a new development in the evolution of our literatures" (p. 174).

Creenglish and Michiflish in Scofield's Poetry

Like Halfe and Campbell, Métis poet Scofield (2005a) uses Cree-accented English to be true to the speaking voices of community members, sometimes with comic but political effect. His poem "Conversation My Châpan Mary Might Have Had with Mrs. Sarah F. Wakefield" is counter-colonial discourse that contests through Michiflish the depreciation and savaging of the Métis, and writing Métis self-worth and values into a form of hybrid English discourse. The body of his poem responds to the allegations and insulting statements in the epigraph from Wakefield's *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity*: "Most of the half-breeds are treacherous. Such is the way with the part breeds, or many of them. I would sooner trust a full blood than any of them. There is too much art and duplicity in them" (p. 12). The angry response Mary dishes up is well salted with imprecations and occasionally peppered with Cree or Michif. It derives a good part of its gusto from the sense that Mary couldn't give a "goot coddamn" (p. 15) nor care a dog's rear end for the proprieties Mrs. Wakefield lives by, including the "proper" English she speaks and writes.

mâmaskâc! dare I shay
you shtupid ole biddy

it is foolish or surprising

Mish Shara
what you got to blab about

wooman
you got home shafe an

you ole man
he foun you to be—how you shay

in your Anglaish?—
not boddered, not molested

so how come dat Mish Decamp
dat udder gaptive woman

she dell everyone you far from
dah lamb-a-God

in gaptivity
but an ole durkey hen

rufflin up you fedders
pumped up wooman

like you got no shame

but me Mish Shara
I got doo mutz art

—what you shay?—
doo mutz tuplicity in me

do be drust-wordy
but you

you shtupid ole biddy
I mate you a fiddle dune

galled dah "Mish Mahkesîs" fox
in dah Chicken Coop Jig" (Scofield, 2005a, pp. 12-13)

The Creenglish and Michiflish in this poem are a defiant declaration of identity in the face of a baseless sense of superiority, and although Scofield (2005a) translates the Cree words for contemporary readers, the poem's Mary makes no such concessions to the non-Cree-speaking, and probably unilingual, object of her wrath. If Wakefield in fact spoke only one language, Mary's ability to code-switch would make her intellectual attainments exceed Wakefield's, at least in the linguistic field. In any event, this ability, linked to her being Métis, and therefore having two genetic and cultural pools to draw from, may account for her ironically appropriating the idea of her duplicity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1998) states that although the earliest and still most common meaning of duplicity is "The quality of being 'double' in action or conduct ...; the character or practice of acting in two ways at different times, or openly and secretly; deceitfulness, double-dealing," the literal meaning of the word duplicity is "The state or quality of being numerically or physically double or twofold: doubleness." Although Mary may be claiming that she is a double-breed in the sense of being doubly endowed, she does not deny her connection with her people by abrogating the name *half-breed*, forthrightly declaring "me I am a half-breed" (p. 15). Both her wit in naming the fiddle tune she claims she could compose for the English woman—the standard English translation would be "The Fox in the Chicken Coop Jig," which metaphorically casts Wakefield as predator, not the preyed upon, and Mary's ability to compose further substantiates her closing claim that she has

... more art
more tuplicity

in my liddle doe, damn right
you shtupid ole biddy,

den you got wooman
in you whole hungry

atimocisk bones. a dog's rear end
(pp. 15-16)

Scofield (1996) also regularly switches between Cree and English in his poems that do not use this kind of Cree-accented English. His declaredly autobiographical poem is in fact named in both Cree and English, *ni-âcimon*/Autobiography, but the priority he gives to Cree in the title is surely politically significant. In the context of his life story, the order of languages also marks a coming home and a claiming of kin through language. The opening section of this poem is headed by the year of his

birth and establishes that his sense of self is founded on his mother's storytelling, narratives for which he says he thirsted.

The *mâmitonêyihcikâna*
 spilled from her mouth
 and trickled
 in spurts, me a dry bed
 thirsting *âcimowina*.

[memories]

[stories]

La Ronge, Lynn Lake
 were dots on a map
 revisited by my finger.

The *pîpîsis* before me
 floated around blue inside
 and went silently with her
 to the grave.

[baby]

But *kîwetinohk*
 I remember
 Whitehorse
 we lived in an old trailer
 until the house was built. (p. 16)

[north]

Scofield's (1999) memoir *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood* reveals that his mother did not speak Cree because her fair-skinned but dark-haired and dark-eyed father had been made to feel ashamed of his Métis origins and wanted to protect his children from the racism he had experienced; so like many Métis after the Northwest Resistance, he identified as French, denying all connection to Aboriginal peoples. Thus Scofield had to learn Cree as a schoolboy from his adoptive Auntie Georgina. The use of Cree in this early section of his autobiographical poem can be read, then, as his adult self claiming kin, refusing to accept the mantle of shame that the colonizing culture encouraged Métis people to wear, and accepting instead the invitation of the unnamed brown-skinned woman¹⁷ he refers to later in the part of the poem headed "1986." She told him her own story of wandering for years "homeless/in her bones" (p. 27), took him for dinner on his 21st birthday, and "planted/a garden in [his] heart" (p. 28) by later driving him north past Duck Lake, a key site of Métis resistance, and whispering to him "*Greg, pekîwe*" (p. 28), Greg, come home. Using Cree thus becomes one of his ways of homing.

Not surprisingly, then, Cree also has a ceremonial presence in Scofield's work, as it does in Sky Dancer's *Prayer Song for the Returning of Names and Sons* (Scofield, 2005b) begins with an epigraph that transliterates the syllables of a Cree prayer song taught to Scofield by his adopted brother Dale Awasis. The song functions in ways that have some similarities to, but also an important difference from, as the morning song functions in Halfé's (1994c) "Sister." Because the epigraph is empty of semantic content, its place as epigraph immediately sets up two sets of relations between poet and reader, as does the Cree prayer in "Sister": on

the one hand there is the small group of those who know the Cree chant and how it functioned in earlier contexts, and for whom it would thus have culturally determined connotative and affective power; on the other hand are those who might guess from its relationship to the title that it could be a prayer song, but would need Scofield's indication at the end of the epigraph to confirm that it was indeed such a song. For most readers of the poem, therefore, the sequence of ideophones—auditory symbols that are syllables without semantic content that can nevertheless function as cultural signifiers—will remain amputated from their contextual meaning. What Godard (1986) memorably wrote of a textualized chant of an Inuit spiritual leader, Aua, would also be true of the Cree prayer if *syllables* were substituted for *words* in Godard's assertion: "held fast against the floods of time the words are unmoored from their meaning which has lodged in a specific context as much as in the text" (p. 94).

In Scofield's (2005b) epigraphic prayer on the page, the syllables become metonymic of the poet's affiliative intentions in the poem as he reconnects with his female Cree or Cree-Métis ancestors and with this Cree genre. He invokes his ancestral grandmothers in Cree, although they bore Christian names: "â-haw, ni-châpanak Charlotte, / Sarah, Mary ekwa Christiana" (p. 28). He explains that he does so to throw back the names "birthed from the belly / of their ships ... taken / from their manitowimasinahikan" [literally, God's book, i.e., the Bible] (p. 29). His foremothers are not really the people their Christian names suggest; they are not white women.

nâmoia kiyawaw
Charlotte, Sarah, Mary

[you are not]

ekwa Christiana
nâmoia kiyawaw môniyaskewewak
(Scofield, 2005b, p. 32)

[and]

[you are not white women]

Scofield's song is, therefore, a "renaming song" (p. 32) to restore to his châpanak "the spirit of your iskwew / names" (p. 29). These latter names are calques from the Cree that declare the women as *nêhiyawâk* even through the somewhat obscuring medium of English.

I am singing
five generations later,

natohta
my prayer song

[listen]

so you will be called,
sung as:

Tattooed From The Lip To The Chin Woman,
êy-hey! Sung as:

She Paints Her Face With Red Ochre,
êy-hey! Sung as:

Charm Woman Who Is Good To Make A Nation
 Woman, êy-hey! (pp. 30-31).

To convey the full ceremonial effect of this poem through excerpts is difficult, this effect being only really felt by experiencing the poem as a whole with its increasingly powerful repetitions in its movement from the opening Cree salutation to the closing Cree salute *êy-hey!* But as Scofield sings home the names of his grandmothers and the bones of their stolen sons, his Cree marks the territory where they lived as territory of the *nêhiyawak*, making it again resound with *nêhiyawêwin*.

Creenglish in the Poetry of Neal McLeod

It is also to do the political work of making the land again echo with Cree that McLeod (2005) so often weaves *nêhiyawêwin* into *his* poems, characteristically giving precedence to its words, which he then juxtaposes with English glosses. Although he sometimes gives bilingual titles to his poems, as he does, for example, in “*nimosôm asiniy / my grandfather rock*” (p. 61), at other times Cree words alone serve as title. In *ê-sâh-sâkiniskêpayihot* (McLeod, 2007d), the meaning of the title is not revealed to non-Cree speakers until late in the poem, and the Cree title is followed by a complete line of Cree before McLeod begins to translate and launches into a bilingual telling of a story about his great-grandfather.

nicâpânipan kôkôcîs kî-nîhta-kistikânihkêw
 my great-grandfather *kôkôcîs*
 a successful farmer went
 to *kistapinânihk*, Prince Albert
 to get farm parts and other things. (p. 64)

Although the bilingual quality of his poems acknowledges the need to cushion the use of Cree by translating into English and to use more English than Cree so as not to alienate readers who do not know Cree, the language politics of his writing contests English as the prestige lect in the territory about which he writes. *kôkôcîs* goes to *kistapinânihk*, not to Prince Albert. The latter is given as a gloss, not the original name.¹⁸ McLeod’s use of Cree also creates a politically powerful situation for Anglophone readers such as myself because my stumbling pronunciation of *nêhiyawêwin* reveals a shift in the usual power relations between *nêhiyawak* and English-speakers. This shift goes some way toward redressing the imbalance between the dominant English and the *nêhiyawêwin* in the poem, an imbalance produced by colonial governance, including language policies and practices, and still evident in the situation that in order to have much of an audience, McLeod must write primarily in English. Still, his use of *nêhiyawêwin* has the power to confront those who do not know Cree with reminders that they are on territory originally held by others, and his code-switching on the space of the page or in speech when the poem is read aloud encodes the coming together of two cultures on now shared territory with the inequities of that

"sharing" made evident by the far greater prevalence of English in the poem.

The whole poem becomes a dual celebration of McLeod's (2007d) great-grandfather and Cree's expressive power through its narration of the story of *kôkôcîs* getting "all gussied up" (p. 64) to go into town, and for all his inability to read English signs, emerging triumphant from what could have been a deflating encounter. McLeod describes *kôkôcîs* and his contemporaries as "dandies" who "walked in style, proud as peacocks/ marching down the streets of Prince Albert/like Alexander through Babylon" (p. 64). This description, and especially the simile comparing *kôkôcîs*'s swagger to that of Alexander, function to subvert the stereotype of the defeated Indian by recasting him as conquering hero. In the anecdote at the center of the poem, which features him driving across the bridge in the center of Prince Albert while it is under construction, *kôkôcîs*'s inability to read the English signs results in his driving "down a lane/into incoming traffic" (p. 64).

However, McLeod's (2007d) is not the story of Cree man as failed modern. Rather, the poet represents his great-grandfather in triumphal procession, also comparing the situation to the futuristic fight in the 1999 film *The Matrix* (Berman, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 1999). That McLeod chooses the moment of making this comparison to reintroduce Cree contradicts the idea that this language has no part in early 20th-century modernity by establishing a place for Cree not just in the present of the poem, but also in a highly technologized computer world at the turn of the next century.

he was happy to beat all hell
riding down the street in all of his regalia
catching the sun in the chrome of his car
the gloss of the metal radiating out
everything in slow motion
as he passed by the metal railing, time stood still
as he was crossing the bridge
like the fight scene of *The Matrix*
but *ê-kî-wâstinamâkot*, they were waving at him
at least that's what he thought
he smiled and waved back: *ê-sâh-sâkiniskêpayihot*. (pp. 64-65)

McLeod makes evident the economy and grace of Cree expression by comparing it with the awkward English calquing of the latter Cree word: "the way you would say in English/is he kept showing his hidden hand quickly" (p. 65); but in the pragmatically repetitious style of oral storytelling, McLeod drives the point about Cree home by concluding his poetic anecdote by repeating the *nêhiyawêwin* word for "he waved" and remarking on its encapsulating power: "*ê-sâh-sâkiniskêpayihot*/a whole story in one word" (p. 65).

In using Creenglish as they do, Halfe, Scofield, and McLeod recreate Cree's verbal economies because they introduce Cree into English texts in ways that serve multiple functions. In colonial or neo-colonial situations, the use of a linguistic hybrid such as Creenglish and Michiflish is always political, a moving toward self-government of the tongue, and such use serves as a means of proudly reclaiming a colonially pejorated identity and a way of both marking cultural difference and constituting a dialogue between cultures.¹⁹ As my discussion shows, Creenglish and Michiflish may be a way of coming home and claiming or reclaiming kin, territory, space, and place in contemporary Canada or even the nation of the future. Choosing to formulate their poems in Creenglish and/or Michiflish is a way of respecting and being intimate with the people about whom the poets are writing and to whom their words are sometimes primarily addressed, because this linguistic choice refuses the colonial devaluing of Cree and Cree-Métis people and how they speak, whether that be in *nêhiyawêwin*, Creenglish, or Michiflish. Moreover, extended passages of Cree in a poem or in a book of predominantly English-language poems establish diverse relationships to Cree-speaking and non-Cree-speaking audiences, allowing the poets sometimes to designate Cree or Cree-Métis peoples as their primary audience. Creenglish and Michiflish are chosen as the most culturally appropriate English media for simulating on the page the voices of people of Cree and Métis ancestry and for honoring the place of oral traditions in Cree and Cree-Métis cultures while helping to ensure their survivance. Also among the functions of the linguistic hybrids in the poems I discuss is their deployment to satirize colonial and neo-colonial institutions and behaviors.

Conclusion

I draw on the work of poets at considerable length here to make the case that vernaculars like Creenglish and Michiflish can be used to powerful effect and to argue that they have a place in classrooms because they have a place in contemporary Cree and Cree-Métis communities and contemporary culture. If we as teachers dismiss such vernaculars as simply bad English, we not only ignore their power when they are used well as they are by the poets whose work I sample in this article, but, I submit, we also risk replicating the colonizing language practices from which Indigenous peoples in this country and around the world have already suffered quite enough. We might ask ourselves, then, do we really want to stamp out such vernacular varieties of English as the Anglophilic Mas(ter) Charlie character of the poem "Bans a Killin'" (1983) by Jamaican nation language poet Bennett (1983) aims to do, or do we want to heed Bennett's warning of what the attempted "linguicide" that he threatens would produce?

So yuh a de man me hear bout!
Ah yuh dem seh dah teck
Whole heap a English oat seh dat

Yuh gwine kill dialec!

...

Dah language weh yuh proud a,
Weh yuh honour an respec-
Po Mas Charlie, yuh no know seh
Dat it spring from dialec!

Dat dem start fi try tun language
From de fourteen century-
Five hundred years gawn an dem got
More dialec dan we!

...

When yuh done kill 'wit' and 'humour',
When yuh kill 'variety',
Yuh wi haffi fine a way fi kill
Originality! (p. 4)

Rather than conceiving of Creenglish as degenerate English and its use by students as necessarily a mistake,²⁰ then, let us remain mindful of how English, like any living language, is continually evolving in the contexts in which it is used; of how beneficial Creenglish could be as an interlanguage; and as the poets Halfe, Campbell, Scofield, and McLeod demonstrate, of how powerful Michiflish and Creeglish can be as communicative media.

Notes

¹This symposium on language and literacy in Aboriginal communities, sponsored by the Aboriginal Education Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, was held November 7-9, 2008.

²An interlanguage is an emerging linguistic system developed by a second-language learner, who as yet lacking mastery of the new language approximates features of that language while retaining other features of her or his first language. A pidgin is a language with a simplified grammar and lexicon developed when peoples come into recurrent contact, but do not share a common language. Although not the native tongue of either people, it does have norms of use. A creole develops out of a pidgin to become the mother tongue of a speech community.

³While editing the text of the interview "One Small Medicine," I learned from Maria Campbell that what I had taken for transcription of Cree phrases in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* were in fact textualized Michif.

⁴According to Norman Fleury's English-Michif dictionary, included in Volume 1 of *La Lawng: Michif Pekishkwewin*, the Michif word for English is *Awnglay*.

⁵To signal her Scottish-Cree Métisness, Campbell does not use an accent on the *e* of Métis, so I follow suit when writing about her.

⁶Michif is a syncretic language, that is, it cannot be classified as belonging to one language family or another, drawing its verbs and the grammar associated with them from Cree (an Algonkian language) and its nouns and their related grammar from Métis French (an Indo-European language), with an admixture of *Saulteaux* (a dialect of Ojibwe/Anishnabemowin) verbs, nouns, and sounds (Barkwell, 2004a, 2004b). Bakker also attests to the use of English nouns in Michif and in one context, some contributions from Assiniboine. *Michiflish* is my neologism, coined on analogy with Creenglish, to name an English inflected by Michif.

⁷Anuik (2008) cites Gloria Sampson asking about rural First Nations and Métis students in Saskatchewan, "What is left for a child to say, when after he expresses himself saying ['I] Tanks, I don't want non a dat.['] he [sic] is told that this language, which he uses to his mother and father and which they use to him, is not good English, and that nice people or

intelligent people don't talk like that." The Indigenous language(s) that may be shaping the student's English is/are not made clear, but the geographic identifiers and the phonology (sound) and syntax (way of putting words together) of the child's speech are certainly consistent with the hybrid language the child speaks being Cree- or Michif-inflected, and Sampson's question certainly implies the home language, the language of emotional intimacy, of children such as this one is being devalued by the classroom teacher.

⁸The *we* in this sentence identifies me as a teacher, but my identity and location in relation to the subject of my article require elaboration. I am a naturalized Canadian of English birth, who grew up and received my formal education in Ontario. I have been resident in nehiyaw-askiy / traditional Cree territory since beginning my job in the English Department of the University of Saskatchewan in 1977, where I teach poetry and Canadian and other decolonizing literatures. I have had limited numbers of Cree students in my courses over the years, but my adoption of an African-Métis child in 1979 further fueled my interest and investment in learning about Métis and Cree culture. I have only rudimentary knowledge of the Cree language, however, and know even less of Michif.

⁹Professor Fleischmann tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to reach Professor Laboucan to try to ensure that he would have no objection to my representing his pedagogical practice as I have in this article.

¹⁰I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who helped me to see that I was not thinking from an Indigenous paradigm when I said that only social scientific research would allow for definitive evidence in this context.

¹¹*Survivance* is the term Anishinaabe author Vizenor (1999) uses to signify not just the survival or simple continuance into the present and future of Indigenous cultures, but also their flourishing in and through the process of the continual change by which all living cultures are shaped.

¹²Halfe's positioning of the nêhiyawâk as her primary audience through the use of an extended passage of Cree is a strategy she repeated in her second book *Blue Marrow* (2004) when she summoned the grandmothers to come and heal.

¹³Although the names here encourage an autobiographical reading of the poem, readers should not lose sight of *Blue Marrow* being a work of the imagination the truths of which are those of imaginative literature, not those of autobiographical facts.

¹⁴For a fuller discussion of Halfe's strategies in the Creenglish poems, see Gingell (1998).

¹⁵Eye vernacular is my modification of Roberts' (1988) term *eye dialect*, a modification made because I agree with Paulin's (1990) assertion in the introduction to his anthology *The Faber Book of Vernacular Verse*, that "the term dialect ... has a certain archaic, quaint, over-baked remoteness that really belongs in the dead fragrance of a folk-museum" (p. xi). He glosses vernacular as a term used in sociolinguistics to refer to "the indigenous language or dialect of a speech community, e.g., the vernacular of Liverpool, Berkshire, Jamaica, etc."

¹⁶For a more complete discussion of Campbell's strategies for creating Michiflish as part of her textualizing of orality, see Gingell (1998).

¹⁷In *Thunder*, Scofield identifies her as Alana Daystar.

¹⁸The Cree word McLeod uses in preference to Prince Albert, *kistapinânihk*, needs to be understood as the name attached to this place by some Cree people in the context of their storytelling about this locale as a great meeting place or a locale where people are well off, but because *kistapinânihk* is an oral naming, it is not necessarily stable across time and communities. When I gave a presentation based on an earlier version of this article at the *Celebrating the Local, Negotiating the School Symposium*, some Cree-speakers present contested *kistapinânihk* as the Cree naming of the place also known as Prince Albert. Jonathan Anuiq, in the written version of his response to my presentation, thanks symposium participant Angela Weenie "for pointing out the errors in McLeod's use of Cree." *kistapinanihk* appears in Arok Wolvengrey's Cree-English dictionary, *nehiyawewin: itewewina*, along with *pehonan* (waiting place) as alternative Cree namings for Prince Albert. Despite the apparently double or perhaps multiple Cree names for Prince Albert, my point remains that in naming the place first as *kistapinânihk* and then identifying the place by its English name, Prince Albert, McLeod suggests a history of territorial appropriation and contested land.

¹⁹See Stigter (2006) for a discussion of how code-switching simultaneously sets up a dialectic that distinguishes cultures and creates a dialogue between them.

²⁰I do not refer here to Michiflish, because no accounts of Michif that I have read indicate that the language is being used by young people.

Acknowledgments

The research for this article was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I thank my research assistants Azalea Barriese and Kristen Warder for their comments on the article and for fact-checking. I also extend thanks to Marie Battiste, Geraldine Balzer, and Margaret Kovach for inviting me to share this research at the *Celebrating the Local, Negotiating the School Symposium*, and to Jonathan Anuik for his generous response to my article.

Correspondence about this article should be addressed to Susan Gingell, Department of English, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5. susan.gingell@usask.ca

References

- Acoose, J., & Beeds, N. (2005). Cree-atively speaking. In D.H. Taylor (Ed.), *Me funny* (pp. 85-97) Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre.
- Ahenakew, F., & Wolfart, C.H. (1983). Productive reduplication in Plains Cree. *Proceedings of the 14th Algonquian conference, Quebec, Canada, 29-31 October 1982* (pp. 369-377). Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- Akiwenzie-Damm, K. (2005). First peoples literature in Canada. In D.R. Newhouse, C.J. Voyageur, & D. Beavon (Eds.), *Hidden in plain sight: Contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian identity and culture* (pp. 169-176). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Alberta Education. (2006). *Nehiyawewin: Cree language and culture guide to implementation: Grade 10 to grade 12*. Available: Government of Alberta Web site.
- Anuik, J. (2008). *Nourishing the learning spirit of Cree and English language literary learners: Response to Susan Gingell, Lips' inking: Cree writings of the oral in Canada and what they might tell educators*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Bakker, P. (1997). *A language of our own: The genesis of Michif, the mixed Cree-French language of the Canadian Métis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bakker, P. (2004). "What is Michif, and What is Called Michif?" In L. Barkwell (Ed.), *La lawng: Michif peekishkwewin: The heritage language of the Canadian Métis* (pp. 5-7). Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican.
- Bakker, P., & Papen, R.A. (1997). Michif: A mixed language based on Cree and French. In S. Thomason (Ed.), *Contact languages: A wider perspective* (pp. 295-363). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Barkwell, L. (Ed.). (2004a). *La lawng: Michif peekishkwewin: The heritage language of the Canadian Métis. Vol. 1, Language practice*. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican.
- Barkwell, L. (Ed.). (2004b). *La lawng: Michif peekishkwewin: The heritage language of the Canadian Métis. Vol. 2, Language theory*. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican.
- Battiste, M.A., & Youngblood Henderson, J.S. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Press.
- Beardy, R. (2007, September 20). *Rose Beardy proud of "aboriginality."* *Celebrate Life with the Seventh Generation*. Available: www.wawataynews.ca/seven/files/SEVEN_issue_1.pdf
- Bennett, L. (1983). Bans a killin. In M. Morris (Ed.), *Selected poems of Louise Bennett* (pp. 4-5). Kingston, Jamaica: Sangsters.
- Bennett, L. (1989). Interview with Dennis Scott. In E.A. Markham (Ed.), *Hinterland: Caribbean poetry from the West Indies and Britain* (pp. 45-50). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Bloodaxe.
- Bennett, L. (1990). *Authors at harbourfront with Greg Gatenby* [Videocassette]. Toronto, ON: TVOntario.
- Berman, B. (Producer) & Wachowski, A., Wachowski, L. (Directors). (1999). *The matrix* [Motion picture]. Beverly Hills, CA: Warner Brothers.

- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Polity.
- Brathwaite, E.K. (1984). *History of the voice: The development of nation language in Anglophone Caribbean poetry*. London: New Beacon.
- Campbell, M. (1991). Conversations with Maria Campbell. In H. Lutz (Ed.), *Contemporary challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native authors* (pp. 41-65). Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House.
- Campbell, M. (1995a). Big John. In M. Campbell (Ed.), *Stories of the Road Allowance people* (pp. 66-85). Penticton, BC: Theytus.
- Campbell, M. (1995b). Dah song of dah crow. In M. Campbell (Ed.), *Stories of the Road Allowance people* (pp. 14-27). Penticton, BC: Theytus.
- Campbell, M. (1995c). La beau sha shoo. In M. Campbell (Ed.), *Stories of the Road Allowance people* (pp. 50-65). Penticton, BC: Theytus.
- Campbell, M. (2004). One small medicine: Interview by Susan Gingell. *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 83, 188-205.
- Childs, T. (October, 2008). *What's the difference between dialect and language?* Available: www.cofc.edu/linguist/archives/2005/08/whats_the_diffe.html
- Cole, P. (2006). *Coyote and Raven go canoeing: Coming home to the village*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's.
- Crowley, T. (1991). *Proper English: Readings in language, history, and cultural identity*. London: Routledge.
- Dumas, W., et al. (2005). *E kakwe nisitôtamâk nisitôtamâwin: Making the connection learning and understanding through language*. Available: www.thompson.ca/dbs/sbo/files%5CFinalReport.pdf
- Fagan, K. (2007). *A culturally specific approach to the study of Aboriginal literature*. Abstract for Literature for Our Times Conference. Available: ocs.sfu.ca/aclals/viewabstract.php?id=376.
- Fedorick, J.A. (1994). Fencepost sitting and how I fell off to one side. In W. Waring (Ed.), *By, for and about: Feminist cultural politics*. Toronto, ON: Women's Press.
- Gingell, S. (1998). When x equals zero: The politics of voice in First peoples poetry by women. *English Studies in Canada*, 24, 447-466.
- Goodman, K. (1987). *Language and thinking in school*. New York: Richard C. Owen.
- Godard, B. (1986). Voicing difference: The literary production of Native women. In S. Neuman (Ed.), *A mazing space: Writing Canadian women writing* (pp. 87-107). Edmonton, AB: Longspoon/NeWest.
- Halfe, L. (1994a). Der poop. In L. Halfe (Ed.), *Bear bones and feathers* (p. 102). Regina, SK: Coteau.
- Halfe, L. (1994b). My ledders. In L. Halfe (Ed.), *Bear bones and feathers* (pp. 103-104). Regina, SK: Coteau.
- Halfe, L. (1994c). Sister. In L. Halfe (Ed.), *Bear bones and feathers* (pp. 103-104). Regina, SK: Coteau.
- Halfe, L. (1998). Interview with Esta Spalding. *Brick*, 60, 43-47.
- Halfe, L. (2004). *Blue marrow*. Regina, SK: Coteau.
- Kachru, B. (1983). The bilingual's creativity: Discoursal and stylistic strategies in contact literatures in English. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 13(2), 37-55.
- Kachru, B. (1985). *World Englishes*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.
- Kachru, B. (1992). Teaching world Englishes. In B. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd ed., pp. 355-365). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Labov, W. (1969). The logic of non-standard English. In J. Alatis (Ed.), *Georgetown Monographs on Language and Linguistics*, 22, 1-44. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- LaRocque, E. (1991). Conversation with Emma LaRocque. In H. Lutz (Ed.), *Contemporary challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native authors* (pp. 181-202). Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House.

- Lutz, H. (1991). *Contemporary challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native authors*. Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House.
- McLeod, N. (2005). *Songs to Kill a Wihtikow*. Regina, SK: Hagios Press.
- McLeod, N. (2007a). *Cree narrative memory from treaties to contemporary times*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Press.
- McLeod, N. (2007b). mamâhtâwisiwin: Tapping into the great mystery. In B. Klar & P. Wilson (Eds.), *Fast forward: New Saskatchewan poets* (pp. 101-103). Regina, SK: Hagios Press.
- McLeod, N. (2007c). nimosôm asiniy / my grandfather rock. In B. Klar & P. Wilson (Eds.), *Fast forward: New Saskatchewan poets* (p. 61). Regina, SK: Hagios Press.
- McLeod, N. (2007d). ê-sâh-sâkiniskêpayihot. In B. Klar & P. Wilson (Eds.), *Fast forward: New Saskatchewan poets* (pp. 64-64). Regina, SK: Hagios Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. (1989). duplicity, n. In OED online. Available: <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00181778>
- Paulin, T. (Ed.). (1990). *The Faber book of vernacular verse*. London: Faber.
- Philip, M.N. (1989). *The absence of writing or how I almost became a spy. She tries her tongue, her silence softly breaks*. Charlottetown, PI: Ragweed.
- Pratt, M.L. (1993). Yo soy la malinche: Chicana writers and the poetics of ethnonationalism. In P. Verdonk (Ed.), *Twentieth-century poetry: From text to context* (pp. 171-187). London: Routledge.
- Roberts, P.A. (1988). *West Indians and their language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ross, R. (1996). *Returning to the teachings: Exploring Aboriginal justice*. Toronto, ON: Penguin.
- Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment. (1994). *English language arts: A curriculum guide for the elementary level*. Available: <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ela/index.html>
- Scofield, G. (1996). ni-âcimon / Autobiography. In G. Scofield (Ed.), *Native Canadiana: Songs from the urban rez* (pp. 16-31). Vancouver, BC: Polestar.
- Scofield, G. (1999). *Thunder through my veins: Memories of a Métis childhood*. Toronto, ON: Harper Perennial.
- Scofield, G. (2005a). Conversation my châpan Mary might have had with Mrs. Sarah F. Wakefield. In G. Scofield (Ed.), *Singing home the bones* (pp. 12-15). Vancouver, BC: Polestar.
- Scofield, G. (2005b). Prayer song for the returning of names and songs. In G. Scofield (Ed.), *Singing home the bones* (pp. 28-33). Vancouver, BC: Polestar.
- Stigter, S. (2006). The dialectics and dialogics of code-switching in the poetry of Gregory Scofield and Louise Halfe. *American Indian Quarterly*, 30(1), 49-60.
- Trudgill, P. (1983). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Trudgill, Peter. (2004). *The new-dialect formation: The inevitability of colonial Englishes*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Vizenor, G. (1999). *Manifest manners: Narratives on postIndian survivance*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.
- Womack, C. (2000). *Red on red: Native American literary separatism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.