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**Review of *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Metis* by Peter Bakker**

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**A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis.** Peter Bakker. New York: Oxford University Press. v+316 pp. Tables, notes, references, index. \$45.00 paper (ISBN 0-19-509712-2).

In the current context of reconciliation between the Native peoples and the government of Canada, there may be no stronger outside voice to help the Métis people in their struggle to right the past, be recognized for their contribution to the building of Canada, and to prepare the for future than Peter Bakker's brilliant and pioneering book. This study combines a complete knowledge and mastery of all relevant literature and documents, the expert linguist's own research in the field, and an obvious caring, human touch. Its main focus is the language of the Métis people—Michif— but it achieves much more.

After a detailed introduction which tantalizingly sets the parameters of the book and states the author's ultimate goal: to save Michif from oblivion. Bakker applies his vast erudition to the multiple angles of this genesis. Chapters Two and Three configure the historical, social, cultural, economic and linguistic landscapes that played dialectically to create the Métis people and their unique language. We discover the Métis are the product of the fur trade, that they constitute an ethnic group with their own culture and history, that they recognize their double ancestry, and that their language is a mixture of the languages of their paternal (French) and maternal (Cree) ancestors. It is a complex language "in which the verbs, question words, demonstratives, personal pronouns, and postpositions are Cree, and the nouns, numerals, articles, almost all adjectives, most conjunctions, and most prepositions are French" (p. 72). This unique and equal blend or mixing of two languages is presented in the next two chapters, as the first sketches the structural/grammatical outline of the language, its sound system, word formation, sentence structure, the contribution of both French and Cree, and the specific ways in which they interact. Bakker's thorough exposition and analysis call here for some knowledge of linguistic terminology, although as the author suggests, some readers may want to skip directly to the summary at the end of the chapter. Chapter Five looks at variations of Michif in different Métis communities scattered in southern Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and North Dakota, and concludes that there is a common source language for these dialects. Chapter Six examines a variety of other types of language mixing in Western Canada.

The next chapter takes the reader on a world wide tour of other types of language mixing in Central/South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, where Bakker applies his interdisciplinary analytical framework in order to formulate “a model for the genesis of mixed languages and the social circumstances under which they originate” (p. 192). Chapter Eight shows the use of the model to understand Michif’s uniqueness as an intertwined language, while the ninth chapter discusses the source languages of Michif (French, Cree, and Ojibwe) combined with historical and geographical data to precisely determine when and where Michif arose. The final chapter is a concise conclusion that summarizes the work, opens up the field to further studies, and ends with an expression of shared regret about the Métis situation which has led to poverty, discrimination, and the loss of language, culture, and tradition. “I hope that this book can at least assuage some sorrow for the people whom I respect and love,” concludes Dr. Bakker, before a last admonishment of the value system of contemporary societies: “It is a matter of deep regret that human languages that are threatened with extinction—especially those as unique as Michif—do not receive as much attention as animals in the same situation” (p. 280).

Peter Bakker has achieved a tour de force: he has given us a book of incredible erudition and ambition. It is a complete study of Michif and a pioneering work in language mixing. *A Language of Our Own* has the stupendous quality of reaching ordinary people interested in the historical, social, anthropological reality of the Métis culture, as well as those specialists who will appreciate, learn, and find excitement and inspiration in the breadth of this linguist’s analyses and discourse. **Paul Dubé**, *Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta*.