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AN OVERVIEW OF MÉTCHIF ADJECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Métchif is well known to have its vocabulary and syntax split between French and Plains Cree. At first approximation, the verbs are from Cree and the noun phrase is from French, including the adjectives. This paper presents a detailed account of adjectives and adjective phrases in Métchif.

Résumé

Le vocabulaire et la syntaxe du michif, on le sait, sont répartis entre le français et le cris des plaines. En gros on peut dire que les verbes sont issus du cris des plaines et le syntagme nominal, y compris les adjectifs, du français. Cet article offre une analyse détaillée des adjectifs et des syntagmes adjectivaux en michif.

Métchif is well known to have a vocabulary (and syntax) split between French and Plains Cree (Rhodes 1976, Bakker 1997, among others). At first approximation, the verbs are Cree and the nouns are French. More accurately the noun phrase is French, although Cree deictics are used. Other than the nouns and articles, the other French components of the noun phrase are the adjectives. There is only a little in the literature on Métchif adjectives. There is a brief section in Rhodes (1977) preliminary grammar sketch. A similarly brief section is given in Bakker (1997). A slightly fuller discussion can be found in Bakker and Papen (1998). The purpose of this paper is to give an expanded discussion of the points raised in those works.

The basic noun phrase construction in Métchif is summarized in (1).

(1) Noun phrase structure

\[
NP = \text{determiner} - \text{quantifier} - \text{article} - \text{pre-nominal modifier(s)} - \text{N} - \text{post-nominal modifier(s)} - \text{relative clause}
\]

Examples showing forms in the various slots are given in (2).
Nouns, whether of French or Cree origin bear the grammatical gender of both French (masculine or feminine) and Cree (animate or inanimate). All four combinations are possible. In general the animacy of a Môchif noun is the same as that of the Cree noun of corresponding meaning. 2 Nouns of Cree origin are all masculine unless they refer to notionally feminine animates.

(3) (a) Nouns of French origin

_Une roche awa._ 'This is a rock.' (fem.-an.) PC asinî (an.)

_Un ouagon awa._ 'This is a wagon.' (masc.-an.) PC otâpân (an.)

_Une maison ôma._ 'This is a house.' (fem.-inan.) PC wâskahikan (inan.)

_Un fisî ôma._ 'This is a gun.' (masc.-inan.) PC pâskisikan (inan.)

(b) _Un tahkwaminân awa._ 'This is a chokecherry.' (masc.-an.) MF la graîne (fem.)

_Un panachân awa._ 'This is a nestling.' (masc.-an.) SF oïsilîon (masc.)

_Un pakân ôma._ 'This is a nut.' (masc.-inan.) SF noîx (fem.)

_Un mêtawâkan ôma._ 'This is a toy.' (masc.-inan.) SF jouet (masc.)

As in Standard French there are adjectives that have morphology to show that they agree with the nouns they modify in (French) gender. The list is given in (4).

(4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>masculine</th>
<th>feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'pretty'</td>
<td>beau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'blond'</td>
<td>blond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'good'</td>
<td>bon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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'short' court courte
'foolish' fou folie
'tat' gras grasse
'big' gros grosse
'damned' maudjít maudjilet
'first' promier promière
'little' p'tchít p'tchilet
'old' vieux vieille
'evil' vilain vilaine

Some examples are given in (5).

(5) le beau printemps ‘the beautiful springtime’ m
    une belle robe ‘a nice dress’ f
    un p'tchít poisson ‘a little fish’ m
    une p'tchité bande ‘a small group’ f
    un gros lit ‘a big bed’ m
    une grosse breme ‘a dense fog’ f

However most Mèchtif adjectives have no agreement forms even if their Standard French cognates do.

(6) Mèchtif general Canadian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>m.</th>
<th>f.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;low&quot;</td>
<td>bas</td>
<td>basse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;white&quot;</td>
<td>blanc</td>
<td>blanc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;hot&quot;</td>
<td>chaud</td>
<td>chaude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;clean&quot;</td>
<td>nette</td>
<td>nette</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A few Mèchtif adjectives have variants that are leftovers from lost agreement. These are true variants in the speech of many speakers, although some speakers have settled on one form or the other.

(7) Mèchtif general Canadian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>m.</th>
<th>f.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;dry&quot;</td>
<td>seque/sèche/chèche</td>
<td>sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;soft, tame &quot;</td>
<td>doux/douce</td>
<td>doux</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples are given in (8).

(8) le bon bouas chèche ‘some nice dry wood’
    l’eau douce ~ l’eau doux ‘soft water’

As first observed by Bakker and Papen (1996), the adjectives that retain their historical agreement forms within noun phrases are all in the class of adjectives that must occur before the noun.

As is indicated in the structural summary in (1), adjectives can appear in

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two different places in the noun phrase. The difference between pre-nominal and post-nominal is entirely a property of each individual adjective. It is unclear whether there are any adjectives that can appear in both positions.\(^4\)

Most modifiers are post-nominal.

(9) \( \text{un chat sauvage} \) 'raccoon' (lit. 'wild cat')
    \( \text{le bladinde jaune} \) 'sweet corn' (< blé d'Inde)

That includes borrowed modifiers borrowed from English.

(10) \( \text{un truck pickup} \) 'pickup truck'
    \( \text{un vieux smart} \) 'a wise old man'

The list of pre-nominal modifiers is short. The most common ones are given in (11). Notice that the liaison forms don't always have the etymological consonant, and that the adjectives with nasal final vowels in the masculine form do not denasalize in liaison contexts. This is why we treat the liaison consonant as a prefix (cf. Morin 2003 for Standard French).

(11) (a) adjectives with agreement and liaison forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>masculine</th>
<th>liaison</th>
<th>feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>le beau printemps</td>
<td>un belle l'homme</td>
<td>une belle journée</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'the beautiful springtime'</td>
<td>'a handsome man'</td>
<td>'a beautiful day'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un bon choeur</td>
<td>un bon n'homme</td>
<td>la bonne santé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'a good heart'</td>
<td>'a real man'</td>
<td>'good health'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un gros trou</td>
<td>une gros n'étoile</td>
<td>une grosse çaise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'a cave'</td>
<td>'a planet (lit. 'big star')'</td>
<td>'an armchair'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un p'tchit laque</td>
<td>un p'tchit l'oiseau</td>
<td>une p'tchite ville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'a pond'</td>
<td>'a small bird'</td>
<td>'a small town'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son promier 'voyage'</td>
<td></td>
<td>la promière yerre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'its maiden voyage'</td>
<td></td>
<td>'the first world war'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le vieux portrait</td>
<td>le vieux l'eau</td>
<td>une vieille fille</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'the old picture'</td>
<td>'the old water'</td>
<td>'a spinster'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le vilain boute</td>
<td>un vilain n'histoire</td>
<td>une vilaine tempête</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'the bitter end'</td>
<td>'a dirty story'</td>
<td>'a terrible thunderstorm'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) pre-nominal adjectives with no agreement forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>masculine</th>
<th>feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un n'aur'e nombre</td>
<td>l'aur'e s'maine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'another number'</td>
<td>'next week'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pauvre blanc</td>
<td>la pauvre bessoin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'a poor whiteman'</td>
<td>'rotgut'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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un grand 'oyage  une grand natte
'a tour'        'a rug, big mat'
un vrai miraclé  une vrai méchante
'a real miracle' 'a real bitch'
aux chaque bord  ---
'on each side'
un jenne garçon  une jenne dinde (SF jeune)
'a young boy'    'a young turkey'

Among the non-agreeing adjectives, only grand has liaison forms. In one frozen expression, given in (12a), the consonant is etymological. In all other cases the liaison consonant is n, even where there are plurals. It should be noted that some speakers have the plural liaison prefix z as an option, as in (12c).

(12)  (a)   grand l'école  'high school'
     (b)   un grand n'arilei  'a big pillow, a bolster'
       un grand n'éclaire  'a lightning bolt'
       le grand n'aroge  'the grandfather clock'
       les grand n'édiujile  'the big needles' (cf. les z'âidjujile)
       (c)   les grand z'enfant  'the grown children'

With agreeing adjectives, the liaison consonants are only rarely non-etymological, as shown in (13).§

(13)  (a)   un p'tsit n'assiette d'or  'a small gold dish'
     (b)   un p'tsit t'animal  'a little animal'
       un p'tchit t'ange  'a cherub, little angel'
       mon p'tsit t'argent  'my pin money'
       le p'tsit l'enfant  'the little child'
       le p'tchit t'oiseau  'the bird''
       (c)   les p'tsit z'enfant  'the little children'
       les p'tchit z'oiseau  'the birds'
       les p'tsit z'agnion  'the leeks'
       les p'tsit z'âidjujile  'the little needles'
       (d)   les bon z'enfant  'the good children'
       les bon z'âmi  'the (good) friends'

Métchif adjectives can also be used predicatively.

(14)   Il est riche.  'He's rich.'
       Il est vide la boîte de poivre.  'The pepperbox is empty.'
       Il est cru la viande.  'The meat is raw.'

However, the kinds of meanings expressed in by predicative adjectives frequently show up instead as Cree verbs.

(15)   Li zàbre mishkitiw.  'The tree is big.'
       Nkî-âhkoshin.  'I got sick.'
       La boîte kishikwan.  'The box is heavy.' (PC kosikwan)

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In many cases there are fully synonymous alternatives, one using a Cree verb the other using a French adjective, as shown in (16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cree verb</th>
<th>French predicative adjective</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le boîte de savon shïkâwêw.</td>
<td>La boîte de savon il est vide.</td>
<td>'The soap box is empty.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le robe shâpowayâw.</td>
<td>La robe il est mouillé.</td>
<td>'The dress is wet.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le vieux kïshïkâwêw.</td>
<td>Le vieux il est fou.</td>
<td>'The old man is crazy.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nîplîw l’hômmene.</td>
<td>Il est mort l’homme.</td>
<td>'The man is dead.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ton expot wînîn.</td>
<td>Ton expot il est sale.</td>
<td>'Your coat is dirty.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 There is an alternate form nipow from Ojibwe.

Occasionally there are subtle semantic differences between the Cree verb and the corresponding French predicate adjective. Sometimes the French version bears the marked semantics; sometimes the Cree version does.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cree Verb</th>
<th>French predicative adjective</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nâhkosin.</td>
<td>J’est malade.</td>
<td>'I’m sick’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'I’m under the weather.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kâwikîhkwâw.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Il est vieux.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'He’s really old.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'He’s old.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of adjectives that show no agreement in noun phrases, nonetheless have agreement forms when used predicatively, as in (18).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cree Verb</th>
<th>French predicative adjective</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le vieux il est fou.</td>
<td></td>
<td>'The old man is crazy.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le vieille il est folle.</td>
<td></td>
<td>'The old woman is crazy.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some examples of post-nominal adjectives that have agreement forms when they are used predicatively are given in (19).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masc./Fem.</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Agreement Form</th>
<th>Gender and Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fou</td>
<td>Fool</td>
<td>Foi</td>
<td>Nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gras</td>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>Grasse</td>
<td>Nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blond</td>
<td>Blond</td>
<td>Blonde</td>
<td>Nominative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjectives can be freely used as nouns, especially if they refer to humans or animals. Some examples are given in (20). If the adjective in question has a predicative agreement form, then the nouns it forms take the gender of the referent. In a few cases there are idiomatic formations, as in (21).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mētis Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un riche</td>
<td>'a rich man'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une riche</td>
<td>'a rich woman'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un p'tchit</td>
<td>'a boy baby'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une p'tchite</td>
<td>'a girl baby'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un gros</td>
<td>'a fat man'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un gros</td>
<td>'a fat woman'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un vieux</td>
<td>'an old man'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une vieille</td>
<td>'an old woman'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (22) some examples of adjectives used as nouns are given in full sentence context.

(22)  *Le trembl'è c'est le promier les feuille é-ayât dans le pîntemps.*

'The aspen is the first to sprout in the spring.'

*C'est comme un fou é-îbîthak.*

'He acts dumb.'

*No kishkîyistamiyiv sa femme une blonde é-yîwât.*

'His wife doesn't know he has a mistress.

Mētis color terms are adjectives, but they have a distinctive syntax, in that they can be compounded, yielding a very rich set of terms. The basic terms are given in (23).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mētis Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rouge</td>
<td>'red'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaune</td>
<td>'yellow'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vert</td>
<td>'green'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bleu</td>
<td>'blue'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viollette</td>
<td>'purple'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chacoulat</td>
<td>'brown'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brun</td>
<td>'brown'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noire</td>
<td>'black'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blanc</td>
<td>'white'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gns</td>
<td>'gray'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two terms for 'brown' are different, in that *brun* is the preferred term for the brown hair or fur color. A sampling of some of the compounded terms is given in (24).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mētis Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>blanc jaune</td>
<td>'off-white'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bleu vert</td>
<td>'aqua'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bleu bleme</td>
<td>'azure'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brun rouge</td>
<td>'wine-colored, maroon'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chacoulat jaune</td>
<td>'tawny'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crème blanc</td>
<td>'platinum'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaune brun</td>
<td>'color of old gold'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaune noire</td>
<td>'dark yellow'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaune vert</td>
<td>'pea green'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noire viollette</td>
<td>'(dark) purple'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rouge chacoulat</td>
<td>'auburn, reddish brown'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vert jaune</td>
<td>'olive green'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Canadian Journal of Native Studies XXXIII, 2 (2013)*
virole rouge  'cherry-red'

There can even be doubly compounded forms as in (25).

(25) bleu virole noire  'royal bleu'

Finally color adjectives can be reduplicated to indicate intensity, as in (26).

(26) noire noire  'pitch black'
    rouge rouge  'scarlet'

Other adjectives can be reduplicated, as well, with the same semantics.

(27) p'tchit p'tchit 'tiny' < p'tchit 'small' (p'tchite p'tchite f.)
    vieux vieux 'ancient' < vieux 'old' (vieille vieille f.)

Métchif derives adjectives from both noun and verb roots. Some have agreement forms in predicative positions.

(28) denotinal

(a) N-eux m., -euse f.
    narveux 'nervous' < nerf 'nerve', narveuse
    plumeux 'feathery' < plume 'feather'
    joyeux 'joyful' < joie 'joy'
    courageux 'courageous' < courage 'courage'
    amoureux 'loving' < amour 'love'
    morveux 'snotty' < morve 'snot'

(b) N-é (common gender)
    câné 'square' < cène 'square'
    bâné 'striped' < bâre 'stripe'
    fleuré 'flowered' < fleur 'flower'

(c) N-ú (common gender)\textsuperscript{93}
    pointchu 'pointed' < point 'point'
    poilu 'hairy' < poële 'hair'

Deverbal adjectives are participles in French. It's somewhat difficult to classify these forms, since many of the etymological past participle forms would be homophonous with infinitives and many speakers lack the French verbs.

(29) deverbal

(a) V-éV-IV-u (historically past participles)
    agité 'upset' < agiter 'to upset'
    profité 'profited' < profiter 'to profit'
    bénit 'blessed' < bénir 'to bless'
    finit 'finished' < finir 'to finish'

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vu 'seen' < 'oir 'to see'
(b) V-ant ppl.
    restant 'remaining' < 'raster 'to remain'

There are a few examples of anarthrous noun phrases serving as modifiers.\textsuperscript{11}

(30) un chevreux tcheue noire 'black tail deer'
    un pistole six coup 'six shooter'
    une machine battage 'harvester'

Métchif adjectival phrases are relatively simple. The basic structure is given in (31).

(31) AP = adv - adj - complement

The one complexity is that sometimes the complements licensed by adjectives can be extraposed. All AP's are either predicative, as in the most complex of adjectival phrases is the comparative. There are two synthetic comparatives given in (32).

(32) meilleur 'better'
pire 'worse'

Normally, comparatives are analytic, and as suggested by the glosses comparatives can be given a superlative reading in the scope of a definite article or a possessive, as in (33b).

(33) (a) plus gros 'larger/largest'
    plus court 'shorter/shortest'
    plus haut 'higher/highest'
    plus cheap 'cheaper/cheapest'
    plus bon 'better' (alternant for meilleur)
(b) le plus meilleur 'the best one'
    la plus jali 'the prettiest f'

There is also a Cree alternative for the comparative, nawa\textsuperscript{t}.

(34) nawa\textsuperscript{t} bon 'better' (alternant for meilleur)
    nawa\textsuperscript{t} large 'wider'
    messe nawa\textsuperscript{t} 'thinner' (SF mince) = plus messe

However, nawa\textsuperscript{t} is external to the adjective phrase. In fact, if the adjective phrase is functioning as a noun modifier, the nawa\textsuperscript{t} can either follow or precede the NP, as in (35).

(35) un gros cake nawa\textsuperscript{t} 'a bigger cake'
    nawa\textsuperscript{t} les bon gage 'better wages'

Comparatives license a basis of comparison as their complement. There are two
parallel constructions, one French and one Cree. The French complementizer is que. The synonymous Cree complementizer is ashpishchi.

(36) (a) Il est plus p'tit que les autres.
       'He's smaller than the others.'

       (b) Il est plus maigre queki ashpishchi oshkal.
       'He's thinner now than he was before.'

As suggested by the structure given in (31) there are other modifiers of adjectives. All are operators rather than lexical adverbs, i.e., they all adjust how the adjective is understood.

(37) (a) tout nu    'completely naked'
        tout seul    'all alone'

       (b) vrai p'tchit 'really little'
        vrai joli    'really pretty'
        vrai vieux  'really old'

       (c) trop rote  'too rowdy'
        trop sensible 'overly sensitive'
        trop maigre  'underweight'

The operator trop can license a clausal complement, with the complementizer chi-Ishii-

(38)  trop braqué chi-atoshikôt 'too empty-headed to work'

There are also two Cree forms that play an adjective role, kischin 'very, special(ly)' and nawachiko 'ish'. The latter appears strictly in the adverbial position functioning as an operator, as in (39).

(39)  nawachiko gris  'grayish'
       nawachiko jaune 'yellowish'
       nawachiko rouge 'reddish'
       nawachiko vert  'greenish'
       nawachiko agité 'restless'
       nawachiko rond  'roundish'

The form nawachiko can also be pronounced noochiko. Historically this is two words. The iko is the reflex of an emphatic particle, but there isn't enough evidence in Métchif to support analyzing it out, even though the other part nawach- ~ nooch- is historically related to the comparative nawat.

The word kischin is more complex. Like nawat it is external not just to the adjective phrase, but to the whole noun phrase, but it's meaning straddles lexical and operator.

(40)  kischin une bonne crinière  'a magnificent mane'
       kischin une journée    'a special day'
       kischin la beauté      'a great beauty'
       kischin bin reçu       'a heart welcome'

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Kischi also has a postpositional usage with the sense ‘specifically’.

(41) *Niewéyístam ékwáníma kíshi*. ‘She wants that *particular* one.’

\(\text{(ékwáníma 'that one')}\)

*Kischi* also belongs to a small class of forms cognate with Plains Cree pronouns that can modify noun phrases with adjectival meanings and specific (although not necessarily definite) readings.\(^{12}\)

(42) *Kischi* grand choque é-shístáchik këkway ékwa. ‘It’s a *great* thing the way the make stuff now.’

\(\text{Mishi la jöb anima. ‘That’s a *big* job.’}\)

\(\text{napaki le poisson ‘that *flat* fish’}\)

The adjective *plein* licenses a complement. The construction has two variants. In one the complement is a *de* + *N* phrase as exemplified in (43). In the other the complement is a definite NP as in (44).

(43) *plein de lente* ‘full of lice’

*plein de huile* ‘oily’

*plein de maladji* ‘disease-ridden’

*plein de trou* ‘riddled with holes’

*plein de sang* ‘bloody’

(44) *plein le sâble* ‘sandy, full of sand’

*plein la joie* ‘joyful’

*plein le tache* ‘polka-dotted’

*plein le foin* ‘filled with hay’

There is also a measure construction with *plein* as exemplified in (45).

(45) *pleine bouche* ‘mouthful’ (MF *bouche* is Sunday French\(^{13}\))

*pleine yeule* ‘mouthful’ (SF *gueule* ‘(animal) mouth’, MF ‘mouth

*pleine main* ‘handful’

*pleine verre* ‘glassful’

The measure construction goes in the quantifier slot of the NP, as shown in (46).

(46) *une plein n’assiette les pataque* ‘a plateful of potatoes’

Métchtif negates adjectives with *pas*. It appears as if the negative also goes in the adverbial slot of the adjective phrase, as the examples in (47) suggest.

(47) *pas dompté* ‘wild, untamed’

*pas troostable* ‘untrustworthy, dishonest’

*pas bien bon* ‘mediocre’
But there is a more general construction as well in which modifiers in general, including prepositional phrases go into the immediate post-negative slot. This is shown for nominals in (48)

(48)  
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{pas d'\textsc{aire}} & \text{\textsc{airless}} \quad \text{\textsc{aire}} \text{\textsc{air}} \\
\text{pas d'\textsc{argent}} & \text{\textsc{broke}} \quad \text{\textsc{argent}} \text{\textsc{money}} \\
\text{pas de \textsc{danger}} & \text{\textsc{safe}} \quad \text{\textsc{danger}} \text{\textsc{danger}} \\
\text{pas de \textsc{pèhowin}} & \text{\textsc{impatient}} \quad \text{\textsc{pèhowin}} \text{\textsc{patience}} (< \text{\textsc{pèhow}} \text{\textsc{he waits}}) \\
\text{pas de \textsc{soulier}} & \text{\textsc{shoeless}} \quad \text{\textsc{soulier}} \text{\textsc{shoe}} \\
\end{array}
\]

Both kinds of negative modifier phrases function as adjectives in all three adjectival construction types: as a post nominal modifier in a noun phrase, as in (49a), as a predicative adjective in (49b) and as an noun in (49c).

(49)  
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{(a)} & \text{un check \textsc{pas bon}} \quad \text{\textsc{a bad check}} \\
& \text{un joulau \textsc{pas dompté}} \quad \text{\textsc{an unbroken horse, a bronco}} \\
& \text{une robe \textsc{pas de manche}} \quad \text{\textsc{a sleeveless dress}} \\
& \text{le laite \textsc{pas de crème}} \quad \text{\textsc{skim milk}} \\
\text{(b)} & \text{\textsc{I sont pas méchant}.} \quad \text{\textsc{They're harmless.}} \\
& \text{C'est \textsc{pas bon pour la santé trop de viande rouge}.} \quad \text{\textsc{Too much red meat isn't good for your health.}} \\
& \text{C'est \textsc{pas de fun kà-nôhtayápâkwêhk}.} \quad \text{\textsc{It's no fun being thirsty.}} \\
& \text{C'est \textsc{pas de coutcheme ôna le temps chaud}.} \quad \text{\textsc{It's unusually warm [today]}.} \\
\text{(c)} & \text{un \textsc{pas fiâbê}} \quad \text{\textsc{an untrustworthy fellow}} \\
& \text{un \textsc{pas bon}} \quad \text{\textsc{a rascal}} \\
& \text{un \textsc{pas de rule}} \quad \text{\textsc{a roughneck}} \\
& \text{un \textsc{pas de parole}} \quad \text{\textsc{someone who doesn't keep his word}} \\
\end{array}
\]

Denominal adjectives (see examples in [20] ff.) are part of a larger class of constructions, in which adjective phrases and phrases consisting of participle + object get recursively recycled as nouns. Examples are given in (50).

(50)  
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{\textsc{un bo'riën}} & \text{\textsc{a worthless fellow} (from \textsc{bon-ârien} which is also a possible pronunciation)} \\
& \text{\textsc{un faîle-le-gros} \textsc{a snob}} \\
& \text{\textsc{un crée-nien} \textsc{a happy-go-lucky fellow, a reckless fellow}} \\
\end{array}
\]

The form \textsc{bo'riën ~ bon-ârien} can also be used as a prenominal modifier.

(51)  
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{\textsc{son bon-ârien marié}} & \text{\textsc{her good-for-nothing husband}} \\
\end{array}
\]

This brief overview of Métis adjectives has shown that their grammar generally follows that of more standard varieties of French but has elements of Cree mixed in. There are some Métis innovations, like the loss of agreement in post-nominal modifiers, as well as the exploitation of options to express the
same concepts using Cree morphology. Mètchif adjectival syntax shows more integration of Cree and French than any other portion of Mètchif grammar.

Notes

1. This version of the noun phrase differs slightly from that in Bakker 1997, mainly in that I believe that preposed relative clauses and postposed demonstratives are related but distinct constructions.

2. The orthography used here is a more developed form of the orthography proposed Rhodes (1986). In quick approximation one spells Cree using Plains Cree orthography except that the sibilant is spelled sh and the affricate is spelled ch. Many speakers have s as an allophone of h after a front vowel. If the source of a particular example pronounces s, then spell it. (Dictionary practice is different.) The French is spelled with one eye toward standard French spellings, but all palatalization is spelled out and all sounded final consonants are followed by e or another consonant, except for final r in monosyllables.

The basic rationale for this approach to orthography is that the variety of Mètchif represented here has two distinct phonologies, so it is only appropriate to represent them with distinct orthographies. There are a fair number of complexities, but basically the orthography is simplified from standard French and respects differences between words that have acrolectal pronunciation options and those that do not (Rhodes, 2009a). English borrowings are spelled as in English unless they are thoroughly Gallicized, in which case they are spelled as if they were French.

One important point needs to be made. Papen (2005) charges that I developed this approach to Mètchif orthography for scholars. Nothing could be further from the truth. When I was doing fieldwork among speakers from Belcourt, I discovered, quite by accident, that my consultants could read this type of orthography without training. At the same time they were having serious difficulties using the Crawford orthography (Laverdure and Allard, 1983). This includes Patline Laverdure, one of the authors of the dictionary. My calculation was that if they needed help writing in any case, one should use an orthography that can be read by native speakers easily.

3. Animacy in Algonquian languages is only partly determined by semantics. No notional animate is grammatically animate, but notional inanimates can be grammatically animate. This includes rocks, tobacco, pipes (for smoking), certain plants, certain body parts, among other things.

4. The one example in the data base is le principal manger de Mètchif 'the main Michif food' next to the usual order le ch’min de fer principal 'the mainline [railroad]' .

5. It should be noted that some nouns have restructured to include the liaison consonant. nouque (SF moj uncle) leu nouque, zoie (SF < oie) un zoie. Some nouns vary by speaker or even for a single speaker oiseau ~ toiseau
6. The Plains Cree word for ‘bird’ is diminutive in form but not in sense. Ojibwe, which is also a substrate for Métis (Bakker, 1997, Rhodes, 2009b) has a fundamental distinction between big birds (binessiwag), mostly raptors, and small birds (binessiwag), thrush-size on down. But both forms are built on historical diminutives.

7. There is an alternate form nipow from Ojibwe.

8. Presumably scorl is a light-reddish color counts as the lightest color for a horse.

9. This is a Canadian French usage.

10. The forms in -u are distinguished from the forms in -eux Métchif in two ways. The -u palatalizes a preceding t or d; the -eux does not, and by the fact that they lack feminine variants.

11. The term anarthrous is from Greek grammar. It means a noun phrase without an article.

12. The structure of Algonquian languages includes a class of constructions that prefix modifiers to verbs and nouns. They are called pre-verbs and pre-nouns. The constructions include a suffixal -i on the pre-word.

13. The notion of Sunday French is discussed in Rhodes 2009a. The term comes from the fact that the Métis community heard standard French in church every Sunday.

14. The Métchif word for nothing is arien, rather than rien.

Works Cited


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