Michif : one phonology or two?

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Michif has been described as a mixed or intertwined language based on Cree and French. Bakker and Papen (1997) claim that the lexicon of Michif is "stratified" because the phonology of each component is distinct. Rosen (2000) proposes a unified or "non-stratified" phonological component for Michif. She bases her argument on questions of phonological alternation and distribution. In this paper, I show that a number of French-derived rules, which Rosen either considers as no longer productive or as non-existent, still operate only in the French-based vocabulary. I conclude that a stratified position is (still) the most adequate for a synchronic analysis of Michif.

1 Introduction

Michif, a language spoken by a small number of Metis in the Prairie provinces of Canada, as well as in North Dakota and (possibly) in Montana, is typically described as a "mixed" or "intertwined" language based on Cree and French (Bakker, 1997; Bakker and Papen, 1997). Generally, mixed languages are described as those "in which the morpho-syntax of one language is matched with the vocabulary of another language" (Bakker and Muysken, 1994, p. 41). In the case of Michif, superficially at least, the dichotomy appears more like a split between French-origin DPs and Cree-origin verbs.[1]

One of the main problems concerning mixed languages in general and Michif in particular bears on phonology. If according to the above definition, mixed languages have two relatively distinct components (a morpho-syntax from language A and a lexicon from language B), little or nothing is said concerning the phonology of the language.

In the case of Michif, it has been claimed that:

[1] The facts are indeed much more complicated, as Bakker and Papen (1997) take care to point out. Even though the vast majority of nouns are indeed from French, there are a number of Cree (and Ojibwa) nouns as well as quite a number of English borrowings. These Cree (or Ojibwa) and English nouns always take French determiners. On the other hand, demonstratives are always from Cree, always accompanied by a French definite determiner. French nouns can take a variety of Cree grammatical suffixes (such as the obviative and the possessive) and in order to ensure correct verb agreement, they must assume Cree animate/inanimate gender, along with the appropriate French masculine/feminine gender. This and other grammatical facts militate against considering Michif DPs as being totally derived from French. Although the vast majority of verbs are indeed from Cree, there exist a number of verb stems from French (and more recently, from English). The French verb paradigm for 'avoir' ('to have') et 'être' ('to be') is also quite common. Other grammatical categories, such as adverbs, conjunctions, adpositions, etc., are from both French and Cree. See Papen (1987) and Bakker and Papen (1997) for a more complete description of the language.

> [...] two separate phonological systems must be posited [...] as many rules are limited to either the French part or the Cree part of the language. This implies that each lexical item must be marked [± French] or [± Cree] in the (mental) lexicon of Michif speakers in order to ensure that the item undergoes the right set of phonological rules. (Bakker and Papen, *op.cit.*, p. 312)

Such "attempts to explain differences in phonological or morphological patterning in a given language have been called "lexical stratification", [where] phonological processes that involve only a subset of affixes [...] occur only at certain levels or strata" (Rosen, 2000, p. 2).

For Rosen, the existence of lexical strata in a language represents a problem of "learnability". For a hypothetical child learner to determine that s/he should build two separate lexicons in which different phonological rules apply, there would have to be sufficient cues available to the learner.

Furthermore, Rosen considers that:

> It is implausible that a child would intrinsically know the historical development of their [sic] language and separate different lexical items based on their historical source. Instead, we would expect to see some invariant phonological cues which would indicate to the child that the different items are to be treated differently in their [sic] grammar. The question [...] is whether a child actually gets the necessary cues. (Rosen, *op.cit.*, p. 6)

Rosen proposes that Bakker and Papen's (1997) arguments in favour of stratification in Michif are strictly diachronic; she maintains that the rules they posit are mainly historical and are no longer functional in the language. According to her, a synchronic analysis of both lexical and phonological facts of the language force a reconsideration of the "mixed" characterization of Michif. On the basis of phonological alternation and distribution, she maintains "that there are few cues available that would lead a child to posit lexical strata" (Rosen, *op.cit.*, p. 13). She therefore argues for a unified or "non-stratified" phonological component for Michif.

The general purpose of this paper will be to show that Rosen's main arguments in favour of a non-stratified phonology for Michif are not totally convincing and that a more complete synchronic analysis of the data suggests that there are indeed sufficient cues for the hypothetical child learner to determine that the lexicon of Michif is stratified.

In section 2, I briefly present some of Rosen's arguments against Bakker's (1997) and Bakker and Papen's (1997) stratified position for Michif.[2] In section 3, I propose a number of counter-arguments based on a more complete analysis of the available data and conclude that the phonological facts continue to militate in favour of a stratified position.

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[2] Bakker's (1997) discussion of the phonology of Michif is fundamentally drawn from the description of the data in Bakker and Papen's (1997) paper.

2 Rosen's (2000) arguments against a "stratified" phonology for Michif

In her paper, Rosen examines two types of evidence from Michif, phonological distribution and alternations, and argues that there is little synchronic evidence for treating the language as stratified. She proposes to show that there are few phonological cues available that would lead a child learner to posit lexical strata and that given an absence of such evidence, she favours a non-stratificational view.

According to her, the processes identified in Bakker and Papen (1997) "are at best inconclusive in determining whether the Michif grammar is stratified. The rules found in French and in Cree are either not productive in Michif, or else simply would never apply in the other source vocabulary due to lack of appropriate environment" (Rosen, *op.cit.,* p. 14).

2.1 Liaison

The first rule Rosen discusses is the well-known phonological rule of liaison:

> In French, the final (sometimes mute) consonant of a pronominal determiner or adjective is pronounced as the onset of the following noun [...] in certain syntactic contexts. This is a pan-French property [...] (Rosen, *op.cit.,* p. 15).

For example, *le peti garsõ* 'the little boy' vs *le peti t-ãfã* 'the little child'. However, and as Bakker and Papen (*op.cit.*, p. 309) themselves conclude, "Liaison processes [...] do not seem to be productive in the French part of Michif for most speakers [...]". According to them, the liaison consonant is treated as part of the Michif noun, which thus becomes consonant-initial.

For Rosen, the French process has been incorporated into the lexical item and is no longer a productive rule for speakers of Michif. For her, **all** French-derived vowel-initial nouns have been reanalyzed as being consonant-initial:

> Therefore we cannot identify liaison as a process which is used only in the French-based vocabulary of Michif, and so it is not evidence for stratification of the Michif grammar. If Bakker & Papen were correct in their claim that some phonological rules are specific to French, then we might expect French liaison to be an example of such a vocabulary-specific rule. This is not the case and [...] they cannot identify any other processes which apply solely to the French vocabulary. (Rosen, *op.cit.,* p. 16)

2.2 Morphophonemic alternations due to schwa

The second alternation phenomenon Rosen discusses is the fact that in French, an adjective-final mute schwa (or empty timing unit) is often posited because of the surfacing of unpredictable consonants in some cases (Dell,1995). One morphological paradigm where this schwa is evident can be seen in the

differences between the masculine and feminine forms of adjectives in French, for example /grɑ̃/ 'big, tall, masculine' and /grɑ̃də/ 'big, tall, feminine' or /gro/ 'fat, masculine' /grosə/ 'fat, feminine', where another rule deletes the schwa in most circumstances, giving /grɑ̃d/ and /gros/ respectively.

Rosen claims that this schwa never surfaces in Michif and that there is no reason to even posit its existence. She admits that pronominal adjectives do alternate between the masculine and feminine forms in Michif, as in /ɛ̃ gro garsõ/ 'a fat boy'[3] and /ɛn gros fij/ 'a fat girl', but that these alternations are not productive and are "lexically listed" (p. 17). She correctly points out that in Michif, postnominal adjectives do not show gender alternation, as in /la ʒymɑ̃ blɑ̃/ (<Fr. /la ʒymɑ̃ blɑ̃ʃ/) and /la ʃɛʒ vɛr/ (<Fr. /la ʃɛz vɛrt/). She therefore concludes that:

> This claim entails that the apparent morphophonemic alternations marking gender on French nouns are not productive alternations. If we accept this, we have no morphophonemic alternation to speak of [in Michif] and therefore there is no evidence that French-based vocabulary patterns differently than Cree-based vocabulary. (Rosen, *op.cit.*, p. 18)

3 Counterarguments in favour of a "stratified" model for Michif phonology

In this section, I provide a series of counterarguments to Rosen's (2000) proposals concerning the question of whether the lexicon of Michif is stratified or not. Due to considerations of space, I will limit my discussion to Rosen's arguments dealing with phonological alternations, which include liaison and morphophonological alternations due to schwa and I will not broach the matter of phonological distribution.

3.1 Liaison revisited

As discussed in section 2.1, both Bakker and Papen (1997) and Rosen (2000) claim that liaison is no longer productive in the French-based vocabulary of Michif. According to this position, all French vowel-initial nouns have been reanalyzed as being consonant-initial, the consonant being either /n/ (from the indefinite determiner /ɛn/ or /æ̃n/), /l/ (from the definite determiner /lɪ/ or /l/, or /z/ (from the plural definite determiner /liz/).[4]

I decided to take a second look at liaison phenomena in Michif. My principle source of data on Michif is the *Michif dictionary* (1983), written by two native

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[3] The form should correctly be /ɛ̃ gru garsũ/ since French-derived mid vowels are always raised to high position in Michif.

[4] In fact, other consonants can also be agglutinated to the following noun, though less frequently, such as /t/ (from /ptʃɪt/ (<Fr. 'petite' 'little'), as in /ɛn gru tɪgliz/ (< Fr. 'une grosse église') 'a big church'

speakers of Michif from the Turtle Mountain Chippewa reserve in North Dakota.[5] This dictionary provides definitions and example sentences in Michif of well over two thousand words. The spelling used in the work is both practical and somewhat frustrating: practical because it quite accurately represents the actual sounds of Michif, although it uses an anglicizing sound-to-symbol system (e.g. /ɑ:/ is written as *aw*, /e:/ is written as *ay*, /i:/ is written as *ee*, etc.) and frustrating because the spellings are not always used systematically. Below are some typical entries from the dictionary:

(1)	**French**	**Michif**	**Gloss**
	hiver	li vayr, l'ivayr, (awn n')ivayr	'winter'
	étable	li tab, (sou)nitaeb, *(aen)itab *(aen)tab	'barn, stable'
	église	l'igleez, ligleez, *(en grous)tigleez	'church'
	ouvrage	(soon)nouvraezh, louvraezh, *(mou)l'ouvraezh, *la nouvraezh	'work'
	animal/ animaux	*(aen)alimael, (leez)animoo, (lee)zenimoon, (lee)zanimoo,*(lee)zanimal, *(lee)zenimael	'animal(s)'

The above examples show that an identical form is not consistently written in the same way. Laverdure and Allard merely write down the "stream of sounds" as they produce or hear it, using spaces and apostrophes in a more or less haphazard way. Nevertheless, if one considers solely the "stream of sounds" these spellings represent, it becomes obvious that most forms are exactly those one would expect, with the exception of the forms marked with an asterisk. In *(aen) tab*, the initial vowel of *itaeb* has been deleted; in *(aen)itab* and *(aen)alimael* there does not seem to be a liaison consonant, contrary to what would be expected. In *(en grous) tigleez* 'a big church', a /t/ has been attached to the vowel-initial noun; in (*mou*) *l'ouvraezh*, instead of the expected /n/ (from the French derived possessive 'mon'), there is an /l/ and in *la nouvraezh*, an erroneous /n/ is found as well as the feminine determiner *la* ('ouvrage' is masculine in French) instead of the expected elided *l'*. Notice also that the /n/ of 'animal' is replaced by /l/, perhaps in harmony with the final /l/. In *(lee) zanimal/zenimael*, we find the French singular form (<animal) rather than the expected irregular form (<Fr. animaux), but the liaison consonant is the "correct" one. Whether /z/ is agglutinated to the vowel-initial noun or not is in fact a moot question. In reality, the consonant is simply the onset of the second syllable of the sequence [lizanɪmu/æl].

The only valid argument in favour of considering liaison to no longer be functional in Michif would be to show that the "wrong" (e.g. unexpected) consonant occurs, as in *(en grous)t-igleez* or *la n-ouvraezh*, or that there is no consonant at all, as in *aen alimael*. I therefore decided to take a careful look at the dictionary entries, concentrating particularly on nouns which in French are vowel-initial.

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[5] The two speakers in question are Patline Laverdure and Ida-Rose Allard. The dictionary was edited by John Crawford of the University of North Dakota.

I limited my analysis to the entries under letters A to F of the *Michif dictionary*. This represents approximately one-third of the total number of entries (106 out of 365 pages). Furthermore, I searched identical nouns in other entries of the dictionary. For example, if the term *ikol* (< Fr. école) 'school' was found under the entry "apprentice" (p. 25), entries under "school", "school age", "school book", etc. (p. 282) were consulted. Approximately 350 tokens were found, representing some 130 different nouns which in French are vowel- or glide-initial. These include all possible French vowels and glides, including nasal vowels.

A total of *sixteen* cases of unexpected liaison consonants were found. This represents a bit more than 10 % of the total number of vowel-initial nouns analyzed. Moreover, in half of these cases other entries for the same word show either the expected consonant or the correct vowel-initial form. For example, for the unexpected /t/ in **(en grous) tigleez*, the forms *l'igleez* 'the church' and *(vit d') igleez* 'church windows' were found; for **li nisyeu* 'the axle', the forms *l'isyeu* 'the axle' and *aen nisyeu* 'an axle' were also found; for the multiple forms given for 'bear' **(li loor, lee noor, aen zoor)*, the expected *aen noor* and *lee zoor* were equally found.

I also analyzed both English-borrowed and Cree-borrowed vowel-initial nouns, in order to determine whether Bakker and Papen's (1997) and Rosen's (2000) claim that borrowed forms were immune to French liaison is correct. Two hundred and ninety-four nouns borrowed from English were found in the dictionary; of these only 6 are vowel-initial (*airplane, apricot, Arapaho, elevator, ice cream, organdy and overall)*; two of these had one entry without a liason consonant and one with (*aen apricot* vs *lee zapricot* and *aen elevator* vs *aen nalivator*). The forms for 'airplane' and 'overall' did not show a liaison consonant (*aen ayroplayn* and *aen overall*). The forms for 'ice cream' and 'organdy' listed in the dictionary do not involve liaison, but do show the absence of another well-known French process, elision: *di ice cream* and *li organdy*. The process of elision will be discussed in section 3.2.

A total of 187 Cree nouns occur in the entries consulted. Of these, only 14 are vowel-initial. Seven show no liaison consonant; for the remainder, the grammatical context in which they occur does not trigger a potential liaison (e.g. there is no determiner or adjective).

What can be concluded from these data? First, if the expected liaison consonant occurs, this cannot be used as an argument to show that the vowel-initial has now been reanalyzed as being consonant-initial. Occam's razor obliges us to consider instead that liaison still operates. Second, it seems somewhat premature, if not entirely incorrect, to state that *all* French-derived vowel-initial nouns have been reanalyzed as being consonant initial. According to the entries in the dictionary, only some 10 % show an "unexpected" consonant and many of these forms show "expected" consonants in other entries. At best, it may be said that there is a trend in Michif to reanalyze some vowel-initial forms as being consonant-initial, but to consider liaison as no longer functional in Michif is simply to ignore empirical facts. Third, the same can be said for English vowel-initial nouns. It is simply not true that *all* these forms are immune to French liaison. In fact, the only example given in Bakker and Papen (*li ɛləvetə*) has the expected /n/ in the entry *aen nalivator* 'an elevator' as well as an entry without the expected consonant (*aen elevator*). Liaison seems to be highly variable for English-borrowed nouns, and that is to be expected. Even in (Standard) French, vowel-initial nouns borrowed from

other languages do not systematically show liaison. Cree vowel-initial nouns are most probably immune to liaison.

Liaison can therefore be considered as a substantial cue indicating to the child learner that the lexicon is stratified since liaison only occurs in French- (and perhaps English-) derived nouns.

Finally, adjacent vowels in Cree are coalesced if one of them is short; if both vowels are long, a yod is inserted. This seems to be true for the Cree component of Michif (Bakker, 1997). Strategies for vowels in hiatus are therefore quite distinct for the French and the Cree components of Michif.

3.2 French-derived vowel-initial forms in *N de N* compounds

Even though French nominal derivational processes are relatively rare and many are unproductive in Michif, the lexicon contains a very high number of compound forms known in the literature as *N de N* compounds, a highly productive compounding process in French. Below are some typical examples, taken from the *Michif dictionary*:

(2)

Michif	French	Gloss
om di neezh	homme de neige?	'snowman'
mal de tet	mal de tête	'headache'
zhoor di nwel	jour de Noël	'Christmas'
poo'd oor	peau d'ours	'bear skin'
nos d'arzhawn	noces d'argent	'silver (wedding) anniversary'
boofeed oo	*bouffée d'eau	'blister'

Some of these compounds are identical to those found in French (*mal de tet, zhoor di nwel, poo'd oor, nos d'arzhawn*), some are slight variations from their French equivalent (*om di neezh* < Fr. bonhomme de neige) but some are unique to Michif and simply do not exist in French (and in fact are quite impossible), e.g. *boofeed oo*: in French, the term "bouffée" refers to 'a whiff, a breath or a puff of air, a gust of wind' and can not apply to liquids. In French, the word for 'blister' is "cloque" or "ampoule". Michif *N de N* compounds usually involve French-derived vocabulary but Cree and English-borrowed forms are also found, e.g. *nik di yawmoo* 'beehive' (< Fr. nid 'nest' and Cree ya:mu: 'bee'), *vaend takwahiminawna* 'chokecherry wine' (< Fr. vin 'wine' and Cree takwahimina:na 'chokecherry') or *boss di job* (< English) 'foreman'. This shows that *N de N* compounding is very productive in Michif.

The interesting fact about these *N de N* compounds concerns the second noun. If this noun is a French-derived vowel-initial noun, it quite invariably maintains a vowel-initial form, even though elsewhere it may have been reanalyzed as being consonant-initial. For example, the multiple consonant-initial forms *li loor, lee noor, aen zoor* (< Fr. ours) 'bear' maintain the expected vowel-initial form in the compound *pou'd oor* 'bearskin'; the unexpected /z/ in *aen zarey* (< Fr. oreille) 'ear' or *aen zartay* (< Fr. orteil) 'toe' disappears in the compounds *mael d'aray* 'earache', *pawn d'aray* 'earring' and *zoong dartay* 'toenail'. Even the "fossilized" form *diloo* (< Fr. de l'eau) 'water' invariably takes the vowel-initial form *oo* or *eau* (< Fr. eau) whenever it is the second noun in a *N de N* compound:

miloon doo (< Fr. melon d'eau) 'watermelon', *zharbazh deau* (< Fr. herbage d'eau?) 'water weeds', *shayayr doo* (< Can. Fr. chaudière d'eau) 'waterpail'. In fact, I found very few exceptions to the "second noun vowel-initial form" rule in the whole dictionary: *frikoud zwit* (< Can. Fr. fricot d'huîtres?) 'oyster stew', *plim di zel* (< Fr. plume d'aile) 'wing feather', *zoongl di zartay* 'toenail', along with the "regular" *zoong dartay* mentioned above, and *likael di zaef* (< Fr. écaille d'oeuf?) 'eggshell', but also *blawn deaf* (< Fr. blanc d'oeuf) 'eggwhite'.

This implies that even for those French-derived vowel-initial nouns that have generally been reanalyzed as being consonant-initial, the vowel-initial form is still most often used whenever it appears as the second noun in *N de N* compounds and therefore this vowel-initial form must be maintained in the (mental) lexicon, particularly since these compounds are so productive in Michif.

Michif nouns are therefore not all consonant-initial, as Rosen (2000) pretends and the liaison consonant which appears before vowel-initial nouns is massively (90 % of the time) the one we would expect if the underlying forms in the French-derived vocabulary still maintain an underlying final consonant. As stated earlier, liaison is (still) a powerful cue for the child learner to assume that the lexicon is stratified.

3.3 Schwa deletion in Michif

In section 2.2, it was said that Rosen (2000) concludes schwa (or empty timing unit) does not occur in Michif, or that at least it does not have to be posited for pronominal adjectives. Nevertheless, as I will show, a number of alternations in the language forces one to posit the existence of what may be called schwa, even though the phonetic quality of this unit is not identical to that of its French counterpart.

In French, whenever schwa is phonetically realized, it is pronounced as [ø], a high-mid front rounded vowel, in European French and most often as [ə], a mid central unrounded vowel, in Canadian French. In Michif, this vowel is variably realized as a high central unrounded vowel [ɨ] or more generally as a high front unrounded lax (or short) vowel [ɪ]. This variant thus merges phonetically with one of the allophones of the phoneme /i/. In Michif, as in many dialects of Canadian French, /i/ has a lax (or short) allophone whenever it appears in a syllable whose coda is a "non-lengthening" consonant (/v,z,ʒ,r/), as in *bish* (< Fr. biche) 'elk', *jis* (< Fr. dix) 'ten', *Michif* (< Fr. métif) 'Metis', etc. Secondly, as in many Canadian French dialects, /i/ can become lax (or short) even in non-final open syllables, as in *jinee* (< Fr. dîner) 'dinner', *vizaezh* (< Fr. visage) 'face', *pwevriyee* (< Fr. poivrier) 'pepper shaker'. Finally, in Michif, a high front unrounded lax vowel can diachronically be derived from a French mid front unrounded vowel in non-final syllables, as in *visel* (< Fr. vaisselle) 'dishes', *krimonn* (< Fr. crémonne) 'shawl', or from a high front rounded vowel as in *kilot* (< Fr. culotte) 'trousers', *kapishoon* (< Fr. capuchon) 'hood', *bitaen* (< Fr. butin) 'clothes'. The important point to consider here is that this vowel [ɪ] can never be deleted in Michif: 'elk' can never be pronounced as *[bʃ], 'ten' as *[dʒs], *bitaen* cannot be pronounced as *[btæ̃], *kilot* as*[klɔt] or *visel* as *[vsɛl].

On the other hand, Michif schwa (/ɪ/) does vary with Ø in many forms: *dimaen* (< Fr. demain) ([dɪmæ̃]) 'tomorrow' but *a dmaen* (< Fr. à demain) ([dmæ̃]) '(see you) tomorrow'; *diseu* (< Fr. dessus) ([dɪsy]) 'on top' and *aen pardiseu* (< Fr. un pardessus) ([pærdɪsy]) 'overcoat' but *awn dseu* (< Fr. en dessus) ([ɑ̃dsy]) 'on top of'; *li mreez* (< Fr. les merises) ([limriz]) 'cherries' but *li grous mireez* (< Fr. les grosses merises) ([ligrusmɪriz]) 'the big cherries', *aen rpaw* (< Fr. un repas) ([ærpɑ])'a meal' but *pat ripaw* (< Fr. pas de repas) ([patrɪpɑ])'no meal', *aen rnawr* (< Fr. un renard) ([ærnɑr]) 'a fox' but *en cheu'd rinawr* (< Fr. une queue de renard) ([ɛnʃødrɪnɑr])'foxtail', etc. These alternations precisely follow the schwa deletion rule of French which states that schwa can be deleted only if it follows a single pronounced consonant. If it is preceded by more than one (pronounced) consonant, it must be sounded (Tranel, 1987).

N de N compounds provide an excellent context to determine whether schwa deletion applies, since the preposition *di* (< Fr. de) contains the unit in question. The compounds in example (3), taken from the *Michif dictionary*, are typical[6]:

(3)	**Michif**	**French**	**Gloss**
a.	pist di pyee	piste de pied?	'footpath'
	pik di bwaw	pic-bois	'woodpecker'
	mawzheuz di mood	mangeuse de monde?	'cannibal (fem.)'
b.	shmaend pyee	chemin de pied?	'footpath'
	biyoo'd bwaw	billot de bois	'log'
	mawzheu'd mood	mangeur de monde?	'cannibal (masc.)'

The forms in (a) all have two or more pronounced consonants preceding the schwa in the preposition and it is therefore realized phonetically (as [dɪ] or [dɨ]), as the spellings attest. The forms in (b) have only a single consonant which precedes (e.g. the initial consonant of the preposition) and schwa is therefore not phonetically realized, again as the various spellings attest. Note also that most of these compounds are innovations in Michif, since they do not exist in any known variety of French. Schwa deletion must therefore be considered as productive in Michif. This rule does not exist in Cree and occurs only in the French-derived lexicon of Michif, and as such it represents an important cue for the hypothetical child learner that the lexicon is stratified.

3.4 Elision in Michif

There exists another French phonological rule, called elision, which applies to Michif schwa (/ɪ/). This rule states that:

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[6] A question mark indicates that even though the words used are French, the compound itself does not exist in French.

> A few monosyllabic grammatical words of the form CV elide (i.e. lose) their vowel before a vowel-initial word. Elision applies obligatorily to all monosyllables with *e* (*je, me, te, se, le, ce, de, ne, que*) as well as to the article and pronoun *la.* (Tranel, 1987, p. 105)

It is of course difficult to find contexts in which elision can apply in Michif since French personal pronouns are extremely rare, the *ne* negative particle does not occur (which is typical of spoken French), *que*, either as a conjunction or as a relative pronoun, is extremely rare, if it exists at all. The only contexts for elision are therefore either the definite singular article *li* or *la* (< Fr. le, la) or the preposition *di* (< Fr. de). Because of the irregular and sometimes fanciful spellings of the definite determiners found in the *Michif dictionary*, it is difficult to ascertain whether elision occurs or not, since the remaining /l/ can theoretically be analyzed as merely the initial consonant of the following noun. On the other hand, the English translation equivalents given in the dictionary often indicate that a definite determiner is definitely present. For example, *dawn li zhardaen daw lapre mijee* (< Fr. dans le jardin (dans) l'après-midi) is given the English gloss 'in *the* garden in *the* afternoon', '*the* reservation agent' is in Michif *lazhawn di rizarv,* (< Fr. l'agent de reserve), 'in *the* water' is given as *daw loo* (< Fr. dans l'eau). If these /l/s are merely initial consonants, then one would expect forms such as **daw la lapre mijee, *li lazhawn*, **daw li loo*, or **daw li diloo*, etc.

On the other hand, if we accept the fact that nouns can indeed be vowel-initial in Michif, particularly in second position of *N de N* compounds, then this fact explains why the form of the preposition *di*, sometimes also spelled *de* or even *dee* (< Fr. de), alternates between *di/de* for consonant-initial nouns (when schwa deletion cannot apply) and *d* for vowel-initial nouns, showing vowel elision, as in the following:

(8)	**Michif**	**French**	**Gloss**
a.	om di neezh	homme de neige?	'snowman'
	mal de tet	mal de tête	'headache'
	zhoor di nwel	jour de Noël	'Christmas'
	kours di zhvoo	course de chevaux	'horse race'
b.	mwawd Awvree	mois d'avril	'month of April'
	pou'd oor	peau d'ours	'bearskin'
	taesh d'awnkr	tache d'encre	'inkspot'
	leevr darzhawn	livre d'argent?	'ledger'

It is difficult to see how one could maintain that the noun in second position in the examples in (b) are consonant-initial: the fact that they would all begin with an identical /d/, the fact that these nominal forms occur elsewhere without this /d/ and the fact that considering this /d/ as merely an initial consonant cannot not explain why in the examples in (a), the form is /di/ and that it represents a preposition functioning in a compounding process, all mitigate against this analysis. It seems clear that elision still functions productively in Michif. Again, elision applies only to French-derived vocabulary items and therefore represents a potential cue to the child learner that the lexicon in Michif is stratified.

In fact, elision and schwa deletion work hand in hand, so to speak, to explain alternations between *di* and *d* in *N de N* compounds in Michif. Schwa deletion explains why schwa is deleted from the preposition if only a single consonant precedes it and if the following word is consonant-initial, and elision explains why schwa is deleted if the following word is vowel-initial.

4 Conclusion

Rosen's (2000) thoughtful paper offers a number of interesting ideas to the problem of mixed languages, and to Michif in particular. There is no doubt that any model of stratification for a given language must bear the burden of proof since such a model is inherently more complex than a non-stratified one. Rosen's arguments attempt to show that the phonological (and phonetic) differences between the Cree-derived component and the French-derived component of Michif are not sufficient to warrant a stratified analysis.

I have tried to show that Rosen's arguments are either not empirically sound, since the data do not always justify them, or they are not sufficiently convincing. For example, her statement that liaison no longer functions in Michif is not borne out by the facts, at least not by those found in Laverdure and Allard (1983). Furthermore, she does not address two particularly important French phonological rules: schwa deletion and elision, which still seem to be quite functional and productive in the French-derived vocabulary of Michif. Based on phonological alternation grounds, there seem to be a variety of different rules and processes operating on either Cree-derived items or French-derived items to offer sufficient cues to the child learner of the language to consider the possibility that it is stratified.

I therefore conclude that based solely on a synchronic analysis of the available data, there are ample grounds to consider that the phonology of Michif cannot at present be "unified" and that a stratificational model is still the most empirically sound.

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