Critically examining the development of an encyclopædic dictionary for Mìgmaq.
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1. *Introduction*

In this paper, we discuss the process of constructing an encyclopædic dictionary of an indigenous language. The issues which we will examine are: the relevance and usefulness of encyclopædic dictionaries; the ideologies underlying the discourses put forward by the players in this arena; a discussion of some of the tangibly difficult issues involved in the design and implementation of such a dictionary in the Mìgmaq contexts. Throughout, we discuss how building such a dictionary can result in the implementation of a programme of critical language awareness. Critical language awareness is generally defined as having to do with awareness of the ideologies underlying different discourses and the social contexts within which language use is non-transparent.

2. *The concepts of 'relevance' and 'usefulness'*

Relevance and usefulness can mean different things to different people in the context of indigenous lexicography. In an ideal academic world, science should be free of any ideological ties or pressures, a reality which is reflected in the notion of "academic freedom." However, recent developments in the social sciences have introduced newly defined ethical and practical constraints that must be taken into account when setting objectives and determining methodology as regards the relevance and usefulness of a scientific enterprise. The ideologies underlying the commitments of various protagonists to different sorts of scientific inquiry can also be reflected in research choices.

In the context of our research, that is, the context of putting together a bilingual dictionary for the contemporary Mìgmaq language, the first question to ask is: "Is the making of an encyclopædic dictionary a scientific enterprise in the first place?" Should the answer to this question be positive, two corollary questions arise:

1. What is the relevance and usefulness of such a dictionary
2. How does this relevance and usefulness create specific constraints on the scientific objectives, methodology and results?

Since the reformulation of ethical principles in many scientific fields of research – particularly those concerning the use of human subjects – social scientists have become more constrained in what they can research and where they can conduct that research. They are also forced to justify the rationale for their research to an extent that was unheard of even 25 years ago. In the mid-eighties, for instance, the American Anthropology Association rewrote its code of ethics, taking

a dramatic step to move away from research preoccupied with the interest of science first to research whose primary focus is on furthering the interests of subjects, i.e. the interests of the peoples whose language, culture, social organization and customs are to be the object of investigation.

More recently, the three Canadian Councils of Research (SSHRC, NSERC, MRC) have joined forces to rethink the ethical standards that they impose on subsidized research carried out in Canada. The resulting code of ethics is much stricter than before, stressing the need to justify the relevance and usefulness of one's research and to act with seriousness and responsibility in all research circumstances. Notwithstanding the breadth and the depth of the Tricouncil requirements and expectations, this should be seen as a positive development, which should serve to initiate a rapprochement between the *Academe* and the world it is to investigate and serve, obliging academic praxis and the elimination of a power boundary that created a difference of interests between researchers and subjects. It should also encourage academics who work with endangered languages to pull away from the hermetic world of discursive closure that the academe sometimes has been. It should also be a remainder that whatever "neutral" stand scientists tried to take in the past era, they are and will continue to be agents for change in a "real world" populated by "real people."

Let us now answer the first question formulated here above: "Is the making of an encyclopædic dictionary a scientific enterprise?" First we must ask ourselves what it means to do science. This is a difficult and large question which one cannot address in a paragraph. However, it is possible to make a couple of general comments. Science, in the narrow sense, is a matter of formulating a hypothesis, testing it on a body of empirical facts and deducing a theory from this testing. This is a simplified definition of the hypothetical-deductive model used in the natural sciences, especially physics. From this point of view, the making of a dictionary is not a scientific enterprise. However, should we adopt a more Aristotelian definition of science, as a body of knowledge which is systematically organized, according to some internal criterion, such as to be utilizable by specific communities (including the community of hypothetical-deductive scientists), then making an encyclopædic dictionary is a scientific enterprise, and is subject to ethical principles, among which figure those of relevance and usefulness.

Once the question of scientificity is laid to rest, we have to ask two corollary questions:

1) What is relevance and usefulness?
2) Does relevance and usefulness create specific constraints on our scientific objectives, methodology and results?

The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998) provides a definition of *relevance* as: "[the propriety of] bearing on or having reference to the matter at hand." They will define 'usefulness' as: "1. that can be used for a practical purpose, beneficial. 2. of use and value to someone, helpful." To fully understand these definitions in the perspective of ethical concerns and critical language awareness, on should keep in mind that, from the point of view of cognitive psychology, some

stimulus is relevant to a person if it causes that person to derive significant or reasonable cognitive effects (Sperber & Wilson 1995). This cognitive aspect is an important one to take into consideration, because in the context of defining a programme of critical language awareness, it is necessary to provide an environment where indigenous thoughts and ideas will be highly salient and attractive. Indeed, creating a context where indigenous ideas seem out of place or less salient than majority language ideas will lead to the growing irrelevance of the indigenous language and the unique concepts and cultural contexts it encodes. In our view, a dictionary for an endangered language must create a cognitive context in which indigenous ideas will have significant psychological saliency and effect.

If we take the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* entries for 'relevance' and 'usefulness' at face value, the definitions mentioned above appear to be simple and easy to understand. The fact becomes much more complex when one comes to identify the real referents behind words such as 'the matter at hand', 'practical purpose', 'someone' and to assign a reasonable value to scalar adjectives such as 'beneficial' and 'helpful'. Basing ourselves on the notion of a cognitive environment, the meanings and implications of these words will depend on who is using them and in what ideological contextual schema they are being used.

Let us now turn to the three main groups of people involved in the making of an encyclopædic dictionary of the Mìgmaq language and culture, i.e. the scholarly community, the Mìgmaq communities and the granting agencies. We will try to identify what is relevant and useful to these three groups of people and bring out some of the ideological underpinnings of these definitions.

2.1 *Relevance and usefulness to the scholarly community*

What is the relevance and usefulness of making an encyclopædic dictionary of Mìgmaq for the scientific community? For the community of linguists, relevance and usefulness usually correspond to a dictionary that will represent an increase in the availability and quality of data, according to linguistic scientific criteria: entries extracted from 'natural discourse' or 'natural texts', grammatical information (part of speech, gender, number, transitivity, etc,), etymology, lexical and phonetic variation tagged for regional, generational and gender identification, connotation (prestige, casual, derogatory, etc.), as well as sentential examples, also from natural discourse.

Ideally, linguists would also find it helpful to find mentions of the words having appeared in previous dictionaries. Most linguists would also be satisfied with a simple translation of each word into English – the need for an encyclopædic content being less relevant for them in the study of the grammatical structure and wellformedness conditions of Migmaq, in the construction of a formal grammar for the language, or in the study of the language's structures and how they confirm or contradict general linguistic theories. Other scholars such as anthropologists and ethnographers would certainly like to see a more extensive description of the concepts expressed through the words.

For most members of the scientific/linguistic community, those features are certainly what is essential if the dictionary is to be a helpful tool, the use of which will in turn be beneficial in the advancement of linguistic knowledge in general. However, the financial cost and timeframe necessary to achieve such a dictionary make the construction of a dictionary containing such exhaustive documentation of a language impossible to achieve in the current circumstances of financial support, unless one commits a whole career to it. In the context of difficult access to funding and research time, this is a difficult thing to justify, as current neo-liberal trends in the Academe (Fairclough 1993) shift the focus away from long-term projects aimed at wide-spread and/or synthetic coverage, in favour of small, directed projects of narrow scope, which study a specific theoretical phenomenon (or sub-phenomenon) in great detail. Thus, devoting many years (if not a career) to the construction of such a project, is risky, given academic demands regarding the number of articles, books, conference papers and the growing amount of teaching and service necessary to gain tenure and be promoted. In fact, given the rapid rate of language loss and extinguishment, in the Migmaq nation among so many others, the construction of such an exhaustive dictionary might only result in a technical museum piece, stored in an archive, somewhere, under the rubric "disappeared language." We ruefully note that science would need to be able to reverse time and rely on trained missionary linguists to accomplish such an opus. Thus the necessary approach is an incremental one with multiple subsequent editions, and the move to a new modality (such as electronic internet publication). Furthermore, we note that in the context of the preservation and subsequent encouragement of an endangered language, the community of linguists probably still represents a group with extraordinary hegemonic power. Indeed the community of linguists, hold several of the keys – discursive and material-cultural – to solving the problem. Creating a willingness to admit to our power, as well as looking for solutions including, beyond financial and methodological ones, the establishment of equal and fair partnerships with the Native communities, is a great challenge faced by those linguists who would resist against their own hegemonic status.

2.2 *Relevance and usefulness to the Mìgmaq communities*

The Mìgmaq communities have a different view of what is needed in a dictionary. Of course, none of the linguistic-scientific features mentioned in the previous section would be a nuisance to educators, writers and policy makers in the communities, but in the context of a seriously endangered language like Mìgmaq, waiting the twenty years or so needed for the construction of such a dictionary[2] is neither helpful nor beneficial. Interviews and informal discussions have indicated to us that there is a certain level of resentment towards the community of linguists (Cyr 1999a:275 and 1999b:284), who are seen as external agents who entered into the Mìgmaq world, took what they needed to further their science (and their careers) and disappeared, leaving behind very highly theoretical descriptions of parts of the language, which were not utilizable for the development of curriculum material. Communities are in fact in dire need of dictionaries and descriptive grammars that will help educators prepare better teaching materials and thus help reinforcing a trend of cultural and linguistic reappropriation. It also means the beginning of a programme of critical language awareness. According to Fairclough (1992:232):

> "Language training without language awareness is bound to be language legitimation: that is, it is bound to present problematical and contentious language practices ideologically as simply the way things are done. The development of the learner's language practice should be fully integrated with the concept of language awareness."

In our view, this means that a dictionary must not only be easily searchable, in terms of lexical and semantic fields, word agreement, i.e. gender and transitivity, but also (and most importantly) inform their teaching material preparation and scholarship in cultural terms, i.e. provide information as to what specific cultural values are carried through the words. We find that, as the makers of such a dictionary, we are responsible to put efforts and emphasis also on cultural relevance. We also find it necessary to trust and privilege the perspective of Native speakers whose knowledge and even scholarship about the culture in question is undeniable. Sometimes, we linguists are so keen on fitting everything into our so called "universal grammatical frames" that we dismiss many potentially relevant comment from the consulted speakers. For example, when the speaker describing his/her language notes that it is sometime hard to distinguish between the verbalness versus nouniness of a word, most of us would react by establishing binary criteria to fit the word into one ore the other category, while this intercategorial fuzziness is probably an essential feature of the language and perfectly relevant to its description. In our dictionary many occurrences were indeed entered by the Native lexicographer as intransitive verbs and given definitions corresponding to nouns and vice versa. After much debate and discussion, we opted not to interfere and to let the language and the language speakers speak among themselves for themselves.

We, as lexicographers decided that we must also trust the linguistic intuition of native speakers/readers when deciding on the 'naturalness' of such and such a corpus fragment. An example of a conflict between the naturalness decision of a linguist and that of native speakers has to do with what is considered a text that could be admissible into the dictionary. Some linguists have criticized a particular text, i.e. the *Setanoei/Micmac Messenger,* written by previous generations of Mìgmaq elders as non-natural because the corpus is not spoken language and because the texts have been published under the editorship of a non-native Mìgmaq speaker.[3] Yet when we asked a native speaker who is considered by her community as an excellent speaker,[4] to read this document aloud, she says that "it sounded like excellent old Mìgmaq." [5]

Such data should hence be taken into account. In fact, in the context of language transmission through schooling only, as is more and more the case in most Mìgmaq communities, a dictionary may soon come to play the role of a language standard. Should one accept this notion, it will have an impact on the range of variation that one will include in the dictionary. From a linguistic perspective, the more variation included in a dictionary, the better it is, because it reflects the 'real, objective situation'. In terms of the speaking community, it is probable that cataloguing variation would probably be perceived as a good idea, because each speaker could find her/his own variety and feel confirmed as a good speaker. However, this is an idealized scenario that exists only in the mind of the person constructing a mental image of the situation. Observation *in situ* speaks eloquently (and often painfully) about the constant and counter productive struggle between speakers of different varieties when no standard is made available. We need look no further than the example of children telling their teachers that they don't need to listen to her

because their mother says the teacher doesn't speak good Mìgmaq. Often all that this sort of comment means is that the mother or grandmother doesn't speak the same variety as the teacher. Another example concerns the fact that we have seen adult students/teachers dropping courses on Mìgmaq grammar because they were constantly reprimanded by other students speaking a different variety.

However 'unnatural' it may seem to the scientific community, the fact of proposing what is considered by a majority of speakers as a 'higher-status form' alongside with different varieties would be a tentative way to start solving the question of language awareness. Indeed, it would be a gateway to introducing the notion of community-internal language planning as opposed to community-external language planning. In our opinion, given the degree of endangerment reached by the Mìgmaq language at the present time, combined with the degree of linguistic variation across the Mìgmaq territory, community-internal planning achieved on a pan-Mìgmaq consensus is a condition *sine qua non* to language survival. Someone has to make the compromise and show the way. If such a consensus does not soon emerge spontaneously at the community level, then we suggest that it may be considered the responsibility of the scientific community to make the protagonists aware of the history, costs and benefits of language-planning for other successful languages, and initiate the discussion.

Thus a critical observation of the notion of linguistic variation, without an accompanying development of language awareness, may lead to more deeply entrenched divisions between different groups of speakers. A description of language variation is a perfectly sound scientific approach. However, describing variation in endangered languages without making speakers aware of its implications is somewhat risky. If a language is to survive in our highly mediated competitive world, internal planning has to be undertaken alongside with external planning. A probable, albeit more fatalistic outcome of the lack of language awareness might be that speakers of different dialect origin will remain disinclined to speak to each other in Migmaq, choosing English as a practical and neutral standard. This is something we have witnessed in the pan-Mìgmaq polyglossy. Ironically, by being true to their theoretical precepts, linguists may be unwittingly reinforcing a hegemonic relationship with the Mìgmaq. By applying the data-gathering and data-selection protocols of theoretical linguistics to the construction of an encyclopædic dictionary, a research enterprise having larger social and political ramifications that does abstract linguistic theory, we may be avoiding social and political issues related to language planning on the one hand, yet on the other we might contribute to increasing the pace of the disappearance process. Although maintaining the linguistic ideal of respect of language variation, in fact, a dominant ideology of how languages should be described and planned, the approach taken by North American linguists, might play a significant role in the disappearance of the Migmaq language. This is not to say that variation should not be described. Rather, it should be described along with explanations on its role at the oral level and its cost at the written one.

2.3 *Relevance and usefulness to the granting agencies*

The concept of relevance and usefulness in the perspective of granting agencies is yet another

matter. There is no question that the guiding principle of the granting agencies is to be fair to all applicants and to distribute subsidies in a just and equitable fashion. However, the conflict of interest between scientific objectives and indigenous community objectives often produces a gap into which many applications fall. This approach is adjunct to the fact that granting agencies are, to a certain extent, subject to the political will of the political party in power, a will which is in turn influenced by the ideologies underlying it.[6] Some manifestations of this influence pertain to the structure and the political agendas of the granting agencies themselves, but it is questionable whether one can impute any will to an agency whose budget and existence is motivated by capital that is distributed by the government. Currently the trend is to favour so-called 'practical research' and thus funding to 'unnecessary' or 'frivolous' fields such as cultural studies, endangered language preservation enjoy less status.

Another fact that influences adjudicating committees, although it is rarely overtly expressed, is the fact that many jury members seem to think that projects on indigenous languages can be sponsored by Heritage Canada, which is rarely the case. Along the same lines, some jury members still think that Canada already spends too much on indigenous issues, so that the money from the granting agencies should be spared for 'neutral' (*viz.* white) science projects.[7] This sort of discourse is unfortunately quite prevalent, even in progressive arenas such as the *Academe*.

Facts and attitudes such as these can be very damaging to grant applications. Heuristics for the evaluation of scientific objectives can be limitless (and quite subjective) and assessors who aim at 'the best' in science may end up writing things that are misinterpreted by adjudicating committees thus confusing their judgement. For instance, from a narrow scientific perspective making a dictionary may be judged as not innovative enough because it does not entail specific theoretical problems.[8] Judgements of value can also arise from the gap between the ideal and the feasible. Hence an application may be judged in the light of what should ideally be done instead of what can reasonably be done. The problem with this situation is that what should ideally be done is also largely a matter of opinion. Some assessors favor result dissemination in highly specialized refereed journals while others will favor dissemination at the level of communities first. It is very possible that two adjudicators will criticize a project based on two completely different sets of criteria, conditioned by their ideological commitments. Unfortunately, the adjudicating committee will often read such remarks as two negative points instead of choosing one of the perspectives. In short, because SSHRC as a granting agency can fund only two thirds of the applications, almost any conflicting comments from two different assessors will be interpreted as a point against the proposed project. Thus different orders of discourse (Foucault 1971), reflecting the differing priorities of the two communities: those who study and try to preserve endangered languages and those who engage in more mainstream scientific research.

Another important problem relates to the nature of the differences between scientific objectives and community objectives and in the way these may influence the agencies through their adjudicating committees. At the present moment, there is no mechanism for granting agencies to hear from the communities involved in the projects. When the researcher goes to the communities, s/he often gets strong approval for what s/he does, including confirmation of the

usefulness for and relevance to the needs and the projects of the community. This approval, however, cannot be transmitted directly to the SSHRC. Nor can evaluators be non-academic experts at the present time. Thus we find a serious contradiction: although the tricouncil in charge of ethical protocols in Canada states that science must be useful and beneficial for the communities whose culture is the object of the research to be carried out, none of its granting agencies have a protocol to hear from these people. The other side of this coin is that when communities finally get some money to spend on projects, many of them prefer to invest the money and the effort in their own community, which is completely understandable. The end result, however, is that the scientific linguistic community is losing its voice and relevance in indigenous communities. Even more sadly, the common objective – language maintenance, preservation and encouragement – becomes more and more threatened.

Facing this difficult situation, the only reasonable solution would be that we who are involved in such affairs collectively request from the SSHRC a separate committee on endangered language scholarship and that we come together in finding a balance between scientific objectives and ethical responsibility. This way the problematics of oppression, hegemony and self-determination unique to the arena of the study of endangered languages will be engaged and addressed. This will also be a way for us, as a community of scholars, to engage in collaborative programmes of critical language awareness with the community who are our partners in that research.

3.0 *Other difficult questions, more specific to the Mìgmaq situation.*

In this section, we critically address two difficult questions specific to the Mìgmaq community. First we discuss the problem of multiple writing systems and how this affects the creation of an encyclopædic dictionary. Second, we discuss dialectal variation and problems related to how it might be represented in an encyclopaedic dictionary.

3.1 *Issues surrounding writing systems*

In the Mìgmaq world, the question of uniformization and standardization of the numerous writing systems remains unanswered. Although one can count more than a dozen different systems in the extensive written Mìgmaq corpus, at the present time four different ones are in use. In this subsection we will critically review the four systems and then suggest a solution.

3.1.1 *The Smith-Francis system*

The Smith-Francis system is in use in Nova Scotia and especially in Cape Breton. It was created and promoted when the Mìgmaq communities had not yet realized that the language maintenance was at risk. This system is phonological, obliging the user to know the language to be able to pronounce written words correctly. For example, a morphemic boundary inside a word triggers a morphophonological rule which influences the voicing of unvoiced consonants. As it is difficult for a non-speaker (a learner) to recognize morphemic boundaries, the learner cannot guess the

correct pronounciation from the orthography. This is a problem in a situation where fewer and fewer native speakers are available as models for the learners during the critical period of language acquisition. Another problem with the Smith-Francis system is the use of an apostrophy to indicate vowel length. In the context of electronic archiving and publishing, problems arise, because in certain computer operating systems and database programs (especially older ones), the apostrophe is a reserved character. This results either in the word not being recognized or it results in the program interpreting the apostrophe as marking a word boundary. All of this having been said, a fair amount of published literature and teaching materials have been produced in the Smith-Francis writing system over the past twenty years. There is also a general and stable community consensus over it. It is thus predictable that, in the event of a reopening of a pan-Mìgmaq discussion about uniformization, it seems very likely that the Mìgmaq of Cape Breton would be reluctant to accept any change to their already well-established writing system.

3.1.2 The Pacifique-Millea System

In New Brunswick, the official writing system is the Pacifique-Millea. In the eighties when the last pan-Mìgmaq discussion occurred, New-Brunswick came very close to joining Nova Scotia and adopting the Smith-Francis writing system. For community-internal reasons, a decision was made to keep the old Pacifique orthography. Mrs. Mildred Millea, a leading langage activist at the time, modified the Pacifique writing system by introducing double vowels to mark vowel lengths. Since then, publications by the New Brunswick government have been written in that system, although some southern communities are said to have started to "unofficially" use the Smith-Francis system in curriculum devolopment. The northern communities (Babineau and Eel River Bar) generally make use of the Watson Williams system (cf. section 3.1.3) for the same purposes. These tendencies in writing system affiliations are interesting in that they reflect more the ancient Mìgmaq Seven Districts division than contemporary provincial borders.

3.1.3 *The Watson Williams writing system*

In Quebec, the official writing system is the Watson Williams one. It is used in Listuguj and to some extend in Gesgapegiag, although the spelling Gesgapegiag itself (i.e a 'g' instead of a 'q' at the end of the word) reflects a divergence from the Watson Williams system. Beside unpublished teaching materials, a few published leaflets and booklets, the most important piece of work that has been published in the Watson Williams writing system is the *Gelulg Glusuaqan,* a Mìgmaq translation of the New Testament by Watson Williams and people from Listuguj. The on-line Mìgmaq talking dictionary is also written in a marginally variant version of the Watson Williams writing system (Mitchell 2002).

3.1.4 *The DeBlois writing system*

A fourth writing system is used by Albert D. DeBlois in his Micmac Lexicon (1994) and his Micmac Dictionary (1996). This system is a modified version of the Pacifique system where vowel length is marked with diacritics, which brings on much the same technical problems as those discussed in section 3.1.2 for the apostrophy.

3.1.5 *The Metallic writing system*

Recently one of the most active and prolific Mìgmaq scholars, Mr. Emmanuel N. Metallic, designed a new phonetically-based writing system. This system is meant to be easy to read for non-speakers as well as for speakers, and to facilitate an accurate pronunciation of the morphophonological phenomena. Mr. Metallic is one of the co-authors of the *Electronic Encyclopedic Dictionary of Contemporary Micmac* (EEDCM) (Cyr, Metallic, Sévigny forthcoming) and has insisted on using his writing system for the 13 500 lexical entries. When faced with this choice, we asked ourselves whether this would mean more complexity in an already complex situation. However, as we gained more experience working with the Metallic system, and as we consulted an ever-growing range of native and non-native speakers, educators, policy makers and writers, we grew excited at the serendipity of our choice. Our experience when showing the dictionary to a large selection of Mìgmaq teachers and writers at the *St. Francis Xavier/Antigonish L'nuisultnej* conference in 1999, made it clear to us that the participants found it much easier to read than any other system in existence and that they saw no problem in transposing the words into their own local writing system whenever appropriate. The participants also agreed on our explanation that writing the dictionary in a writing system external to all communities was a way of avoiding favouring one community writing system over another. This led us to believe that the Metallic writing system can become a sort of *scripta franca*, a writing system that is easy to read, to pronounce and to convert into local orthographies. Thus convinced, we agreed to use his system as long as the question of uniformization remains open.[9] Our position was explained clearly on several occasions to persons in positions of authority in various communities in the three provinces: as long as there is no consensus around uniformization, there may appear as many new writing systems as there are scholars who wish to invent them. Taking this stance indicated, from a critical point of view, that to problematize the writing system issue as a part of a program of critical language awareness and to attempt to reinitiate a dialog about it among the communities is to take a significant step towards finding a resolution for this hurtful problem.

3.2 *Dialectal variation*

In this section we discuss dialectal variation and the sorts of challenges it brings to the table in the creation of an encyclopaedic dictionary. Dialectical variation in the Mìgmaq speech communities is not much different from that in other indigenous speech communities. We briefly discuss phonetic and lexical variation.

Variation manifests itself most evidently at the phonetic level. Some communities display more archaic/classical tendencies, such as in Gesgapegiag in Québec and Burnt Church in New Brunswick. Archaic or classical, in our view as well as in the view of native speakers, means that vowels and syllabic structures reflect more closely 19th and early 20th century usage. Speakers of other varieties comment on this variety as "older Mìgmaq" or "past generations Mìgmaq". Other communities display more advanced phonetic features, eg. Listuguj or Big Cove. By advanced we mean that the language shows a more advanced phonetic and syllabic erosion. More vowels have centralized as schwas or have totally disappeared, leaving traces of morphophonemic phenomena (e.g. previously intervocalic voiced consonants remaining voiced

even in a new devoicing syllable context). This type of Mìgmaq is occasionally referred to as "childish Mìgmaq", which seems to mean that the users of this more advanced variety sound, to the ear of speakers of the more classical variety, like children or teens when they speak.

There is also a considerable amount of lexical variation. On the one hand, this variation reflects universal tendencies in grammaticalization. On the other hand, however, a new type of variation is most certainly reflects the political split imposed on the Mìgmaq as a people since the colonial era. Indeed, it is our hypothesis that, before the Cession, First Nations were free to travel across their vast territories and to organize social gatherings of significant magnitude such as pow wows and other gatherings. These most probably had, among other things, a linguistic uniformization function. What we mean by this is that, on these occasions, people had the opportunity to compare the neologisms locally created over the year to convey new concepts, artifacts or realities. The pan-Mìgmaq gatherings probably functioned as a sort of 'language academy' or a 'terminology center.' After 1831, when the first system of Indian reserves was established, such gathering opportunities disappeared, leaving each community more or less isolated in terms of global organization and consensus. In the early seventies, following the Indian Red Book, the federal government devolved education matters to each reserve independently, the situation became even more isolating, to the point where it can be judged as 'isolationist'. Indeed until very recently, communities opted for reserve-bound educational decisions and the idea of common school boards was unheard of.

As a consequence, lexical variation has most probably increased significantly through the past century. A symptom of this is the fact that when one visits schools in Mìgmaq communities, one finds that simple terms such as ladies rooms/men rooms are referred to with almost as many different terms as there are communities. Another symptom is that, since the reinstallment of pow wows, where people from the whole Mìgmaq country come and gather, many individuals acknowledge that when they talk with people from other communities, they prefer to speak English, even when both parties are fluent speakers of Mìgmaq. This is largely because they don't want to be laughed at, given the divergence in their way of speaking. It is also current for people from one community to either marvel at or mock the neologisms created in other communities.

3.2.1 *Dialectal variation and dictionary construction*

In the context of the making of a dictionary one cannot deny the necessity of taking variation into account. However, although it seems ideal to include all the local or regional varieties in each entry and/or article of the dictionary, other approaches might be envisioned, particularly in the context of urgent language planning and language teaching. On the one hand, including all variation (morphosyntactic, lexical and/or phonetic) into the dictionary, although perhaps important, is a costly enterprise. This has not been possible during the making of the first version of our dictionary, because our funding was not enough to organize networks of consultants on every relevant site, a basic condition for the achievement of such an objective. On the other hand, given our previous discussion in this paper, it seems necessary to propose an approach that will be profitable for language planners and curriculum material developers. Pursuant to this,

there is a fair consensus toward the more archaic/classical variety as the ‘best’ one, regardless of whatever variety of Mìgmaq is used by different speakers whom you might consult. In fact, both southern and northern speakers (South of the Miramichi and North of the Miramichi) agree that the most beautiful Mìgmaq variety is that of Burnt Church, a variety of Mìgmaq which exemplifies classical Mìgmaq. In fact, beyond mere eloquence, when it comes to lexical/morphological judgements, one reason for granting a speaker the status of ‘very good speaker’ always has to do with the fact that the speaker demonstrates an ability to speak with features belonging to the past or older generation. In the perspective that our dictionary will be abundantly used as a reference tool for the development of curricular material, it seems to us equally necessary to include in the dictionary a classical content. This classical content can be extracted from previous dictionaries, such as Silas Rand's (1888), and from written documents from the past century, i.e. the Micmac Messenger, epistolary correspondance, recorded speech, and other written and printed documents.

Our intention in doing so is to propose a language model which, although not the most current at the present time, is one which is given the status of being the best and most prestigious variety. We think that if there is a chance to achieve a linguistic and socio-political consensus to adopt a common variety for the purpose of language planning and development, it would be around the adoption of this more classical variety. It would become a transregional/transdialectal *lingua franca* which would be taught in schools and be the locus for a pan dialectal regulating organism. Again, we reinforce the notion that this can not be achieved without the creation of such a language model being accompanied by or even being part of a programme of critical language awareness. Creating awareness of the values and ideologies underlying the adherence to or use of different dialects will avoid the possibi lity that the Mìgmaq speech communities continue to parcel out the language in groups of variants, each of which will have relatively little status in the face of English and will fall into complete disuse in the long run. The compromise inherent to the development of a standard, while preserving variation in a digital archive (in an expanded multi-modal, on-line version of the EEDCM) represents a cost-effective and ideologically-sound idea (Sévigny forthcoming). This preserves the indigenous language and quickly transfers stewardship of the linguistic and cultural archive to the Mìgmaq, thus encouraging self-determination and linguistic and cultural reappropriation.

4.0 Conclusion

We have critically discussed several issues relating to the creation of an encyclopaedic dictionary for the Mìgmaq language. We reviewed the concepts of ‘relevance’ and ‘usefulness’ and demonstrated how their definitions can vary depending on who is using them. In our particular case we discussed the importance of the three main protagonists in any play involving indigenous research: academics, granting agencies and the indigenous communities themselves. We showed that these groups do not agree on what is to be considered relevant and useful, and that there is not even the possibility of a proper discussion between the three groups, given that there exists no forum in which to conduct such a discussion. In section three we discussed two (among several) important problems one must face when one wishes to construct an

encyclopædic dictionary for Mìgmaq: choosing a writing system and representing dialectal variation. We showed that both issues are very politically charged and will only be resolved through discussion and the beginning of a concerted programme of critical language awareness. Finally, we briefly mentioned the idea of creating a digital linguistic and cultural archive of the Mìgmaq language would constitute a step towards language preservation and, a tool for critical language awareness. There remain many issues to be discussed and many problems to be resolved, but we think that with a concerted effort and practical thinking on the part of the three groups we talked about in section 2, the Mìgmaq language can not only be preserved, but thrive.

Notes

1. This will be true until indigenous communities acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for the construction of their own linguistics and pedagogical resources.

2. The two decade estimation is based upon a linguist with minimal resources (which is often the case in Canada, given funding trends in the humanities and social sciences). It should be noted that for such a dictionary to be useful, it would also have to address the idea of encyclopædic knowledge. This, in and of itself, is very time-consuming, given traditional, non-electronic research methods.

3. A good example of this is the work of Father Pacifique who produced thousands of pages of edited literary Mìgmaq in the *Setanoei/Micmac Messenger*. Other works by missionaries and teachers that have been preserved exist, but are often scorned by linguists as representing non-natural language corpora. The problem is that when there are fewer and fewer speakers of a native language, and the language is fragmenting into dialectal variants heavily influenced by contact with English, sometimes the return to a literary standard is the best means of solidifying the language's status in the community and ressurrecting it. Examples of this sort of language ressuscitation are Hebrew and Irish.

4. This is often because she speaks a more archaic/classical variety of Mìgmaq. Thus our intuition about using written corpus for examples.

5. On the question of naturalness of data/corpora in the case of languages that have not yet undergone internal language planning we refer the audience to the archives of the FUNKNET listserv where there was an excellent, extensive discussion on this topic in 1996.

6. They are at least subject to the political party in power's *perception of value* of the research that they are supporting. In the current neo-conservative climate, we have seen a shift towards the 'practical' and the 'applicable' for example (notwithstanding a lack of any sort of authoritative definition of these concepts).

7. We would not refer to this kind of situation if we had not heard such opinions from the mouths of people sitting on SSHRC juries.

8. Although anyone who has participated in a project of indigenous lexicography knows that there are many theoretical and technical difficulties that have not even been problematized, given the novelty of the field.

9. The fact remains that it is also relatively easy to write a macro that will convert any writing system into another in a digital medium.

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