



**Language in the News:**  
**Because Words of the Year!**

Jennifer Abel

The last few months saw a flurry of nominees for 2013 Word of the Year. In November, Oxford Dictionaries selected ‘selfie’ – defined as “a photograph one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website” – as its top international word. The Oxford Dictionaries editors noted that according to their ongoing language research program, “the frequency of the word *selfie* has increased by 17,000% since [2012]” (<http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/press-releases/oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year-2013/>, retrieved Feb. 15, 2014).

‘Selfie’ was also up for the American Dialect Society’s Word of the Year, but lost to ‘because’ in a January vote. ADS members “recognized that *because* is now being used in new ways to introduce a noun, adjective, or other part of speech”

(<http://www.americandialect.org/because-is-the-2013-word-of-the-year>, retrieved Feb. 15, 2014). In informal online writing, ‘because’ is often used in constructions like ‘because tired’ or ‘because language change’ to concisely (and sometimes humorously) express reasons. ‘Because’ also beat out ‘selfie’ in the Most Useful category.

**Linguistic News**

Liz Christie

**Insight Award**

Dr. Marguerite MacKenzie of the Memorial University of Newfoundland has been announced as the winner of the 2013 Insight Award. This \$50,000 award recognizes her efforts to preserve the Innu language through work on *Knowledge and Human Resources for Innu Language Development* and *The Innu Language Project*.

**Royal Society of Canada**

Dr. Sali Tagliamonte from the University of Toronto has recently been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada for her work on language variation and change. Dr. Tagliamonte's projects on varieties of English (including African-American, Canadian, and Northern Irish) as well as teen, television and internet languages have provided a context in which new linguists can enter the field from their own areas of interest.

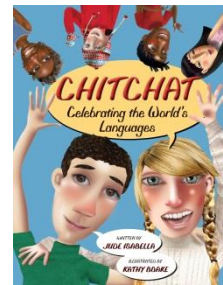
**Cantonese Studies at UBC**

In October of last year, Dr. Gage Averill, UBC's Dean of Arts, announced a \$2 million donation by Alex and Chi Shum Watt, which is one of the largest donations to the study of language ever given in Canada. As a result UBC will be developing a new Cantonese studies program, which will include both language and literature courses.

**New in Print**

Jennifer Abel

There aren't many resources available to help get kids interested in how language works. A welcome addition to the language-discovery library is the new Canadian book



*Chitchat: Celebrating the World's Languages* (Kids Can Press, 2013), by author Jude Isabella and illustrator Kathy Boake. Aimed at grade 4-6 students, *Chitchat* surveys many of the big ideas in language and linguistic research, including some that you wouldn't expect in a children's book. For instance, in addition to sections on slang, constructing languages, and language change, there's discussion of topics like language endangerment and death, and of the possible genetic basis of language. There are activities and quizzes that kids can try, and the two-page sections make it easy to dip into the book anywhere and get a quick taste of a topic. While there's no special focus on the Canadian language landscape, Aboriginal languages like Cree, Inuktitut and Mohawk are mentioned. It's not a perfect book: the topics seem to jump from one to the other without a logical progression, and there are a couple of factual errors (like the statement that all Indo-European languages are descended from Latin). But overall, *Chitchat* is well worth picking up for a budding language-lover near you.

**Newsletter Team**

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CANADIAN LANGUAGE MUSEUM  
MUSÉE CANADIEN DES LANGUES

Membership Newsletter #3

Spring 2014



**New Exhibit: Le français au Canada**

The Museum's newest exhibit opened on March 24 at New College, University of Toronto. The exhibit will be at the University of Western Ontario from May 1-4, at Brock University from May 24-30 for the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and at the Université de Moncton from June 12-14 for the conference *Les français d'ici*.

**Exhibit news**

**Canadian English, Eh?**

This exhibit has recently been shown at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon and at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

**Speaking the Inuit Way**

This exhibit was shown at Aboriginal Studies, University of Toronto, in February, and at Glendon College, Toronto and Fleming College Peterborough in March. It will be displayed at Memorial University, St. John's from April 25 until the end of May.

**New Website!!**

Our website is being redesigned! Watch for improvements over the next few months.

**Language spotlight: Michif**

*Nicole Rosen*

Michif is a language spoken by a subset of Métis people, mostly located in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It is what is known as a *contact language*, meaning it arose out of contact of two (or more) different languages and cultures.

Michif was likely formed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the result of contact between Cree and Ojibwe speaking nations and French fur traders in the Red River Valley of Manitoba. The Métis, the offspring of these mixed unions, were identified as a new ethnic group as early as the first decade of the 1800s, and it is likely from these offspring that the Michif language was created. Pockets of Michif speakers are now found in western Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and North Dakota, with some as far west as Alberta and Montana, due to their dispersion after defeats of the Red River Resistance of 1870 and the Battle of Batoche of 1885. However, the homogeneity of the Michif language throughout these pockets of speakers has led to the conclusion that Michif must have been robust before this dispersion, and so this must date to the first half of the nineteenth century. Bakker (1997) estimates it was spoken by a few thousand speakers in its heyday.

Michif is considered unusual because generally speaking, the vocabulary is split along parts of speech, where nouns, determiners and adjectives tend to come from French, while verbal elements tend to come from Plains Cree. Consider the following examples, where the italicized words are derived from French and non-italicized are from Plains Cree.

*Laglas*iwān *li* *grañ* *shmaeñ* shooshkwaaw.

'There's ice on the highway, it's slippery.'

*Saeñk* *lii* *sheezh* *ver* n-dayaan

'I've got five green chairs.'

All varieties of Michif are endangered; many speakers are involved in revitalization programs in their communities so that this important part of Canadian history culture will remain with us.

Check out our website: [www.languagemuseum.ca](http://www.languagemuseum.ca)  
See us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/clm.mcl>  
CLM on CafePress: <http://www.cafepress.ca/clmmcl>