Literary Translation From, Into and Between Indigenous Languages in Quebec

Report written by Catherine Ego
Vice-President for Quebec
Literary Translators' Association of Canada (LTAC)

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This research project, financially supported by the Access Copyright Foundation's Marian Hebb Research Grant program, is intended to provide an overview of literary translation from, into and between Indigenous languages in Quebec.

The information gathered for this study is based on documentary research as well as on interviews conducted with translators, publishers, knowledge keepers, and other individuals specializing in translation, linguistics, and Indigenous languages[1]. All the interviews were carried out in person between March and December 2023.

1. The people interviewed for this study are listed in the appendix.

I. Present Situation

1. Background

For the past twenty years or so, Indigenous realities have been attracting more and more university research and eliciting growing interest from the general public. A number of government initiatives have been set up to foster reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and to repair the harm caused by colonization. These initiatives include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (the TRC, 2007–2015)[2] and the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations Between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Quebec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress (the Viens Commission, 2016–2019).[3] Reconciliation and repair call for the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages. To draw attention to this need, the United Nations declared the period from 2022 to 2032 to be the "International Decade of Indigenous Languages."[4] In Canada, sixty Indigenous languages belonging to twelve language families were still spoken in 2011.[5] However, over the years, there has been a decline in the number of Indigenous people (1) who are able to carry on a conversation in an Indigenous language, and (2) who learn an Indigenous language as their first language in childhood.[6]

The literary translation and book publishing sectors could, in principle, play an important role in the promotion, preservation, and even revitalization of Indigenous languages in Quebec and the rest of Canada. This report considers the potential contribution of these sectors.

2. https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/guides/en/commissions-d-enquete-au-quebec-depuis-1867/7738-commission-viens. The TRC's final reports are available at https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/DepotNumerique_v2/AffichageFichier.aspx?idf=234235.

3. https://www.cerp.gouv.qc.ca/index.php?id=3&L=1. The Viens Commission's final report is available at https://www.cerp.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers_clients/Rapport/Final_report.pdf.

4. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/indigenous-languages.html

5. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_3-eng.cfm

6. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021012/98-200-x2021012-fra.cfm

2. Literary translation or general/specialized translation?

The individuals interviewed for this study all agreed that translation involving an Indigenous language is essentially general or specialized in nature, and not literary. Non-literary translation includes that of government documents made available to communities in their language to publicize programs: brochures on the legal process and the rights of accused persons in custody;[7] information leaflets on health;[8] and so on.

Various non-governmental organizations also strive to ensure that some of their documents are translated into Indigenous languages. The provincial political party Québec solidaire, for instance, has had its platform translated into seven of the Indigenous languages in Quebec.[9]

7. The Viens Commission's final report states that, "Under the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, however: 'Every person arrested or detained has a right to be promptly informed, in a language he understands, of the grounds of his arrest or detention'.1061 The obligation to ensure that the person under arrest is able to understand the nature of their rights is also clearly established in case law.1062 The courts have also confirmed that an individual under arrest who does not understand the information transmitted to them should be able to benefit from accommodation measures, such as the presence of an interpreter or the translation of appropriate information into their language."1063 https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/DepotNumerique_v2/AffichageFichier.aspx?idf=234235, p. 142

Further on, the report includes, "CALL FOR ACTION No. 14 — Make Indigenous language translation and interpreting services permanently accessible throughout Quebec by establishing a centralized database of government-employed interpreters and translators." p. 243

8. The document *La sécurisation culturelle en santé et services sociaux* (ensuring cultural safety in health and social services) (available in French only), released by the Quebec Direction des communications, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux in 2021, provides a list of practices for managers. Those practices include implementing the necessary resources so that the Inuit and First Nations receive services and care in the language they speak. https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2020/20-613-02W.pdf, p. 23

Canada's Food Guide, for example, has been translated into a number of Indigenous languages. See https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/resources/snapshot/languages.html.

9. https://Quebecsolidaire.net/nouvelle/une-premiere-Quebec-solidaire-traduit-ses-engagements-en-sept-langues-autochtones

3. Translation from, into and between indigenous languages: in children's and adult literature?

The people interviewed stressed that literary translation[10] **between Indigenous languages** is still extremely rare. One example would be *Sila*, a fable about climate change written in Greenlandic (Kalaallisut)[11] by Lana Hansen and translated into Inuktitut by Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk.[12]

One of the interviewees mentioned that some books have been translated from Cree into Innu-aimun, to help students learn their Indigenous mother tongue. These books seem to have been produced by educational institutions or school boards and circulated strictly within the school network. As such, they would have never reached the general public.[13]

The first texts translated **into Indigenous languages** were sections of the Bible and other religious writings. They were usually translated by missionaries,[14] who also prepared a number of language-related works, such as glossaries and grammar books, which remain useful to linguists today. The Bible continues to be translated into some Indigenous languages. Frances Mowatt, for example, spent twenty years translating the Bible into Anishinaabemowin.[15] The Canadian Bible Society, which still supports the translation of the Christian scriptures into Indigenous languages, published the Bible in Mohawk (Kanien'kéha) in 2003.[16]

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10. According to the criteria adopted by the Literary Translators' Association of Canada for admission as a full member, "literary translation" refers to any book-length translation of a literary work, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, short stories, biographies and plays (but excluding practical guides and textbooks), published by an established publishing house. https://www.attlc-ltac.org/en/how-to-become-an-ltac-member/

11. Indigenous language names and spellings have varied over time and can differ from one source to another. This report uses, insofar as possible, the name and spelling appearing in the source cited.

12. Lana Hansen, *ᓯᓚ. ᑲᓛᓪᓖᑦ ᐅᓂᒃᑳᑐᐊᖓ ᓯᓚᕐᔪᐊᒥ ᓯᓚᐅᑉ ᐊᓯᔾᔨᐸᓪᓕᐊᓂᖓᓄᐊᖓᔪᖅ*, *Sila: kalaalliit unikkaatuanga silarjuami silaup asijjipallianinganuangajuq*, translated by Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk into Inuktitut (Montreal: Imaginaire | Nord and Inukjuak, Avataq Cultural Institute), https://inuit.uqam.ca/en/article/first-translation-between-two-inuit-languages. See also https://inuit.uqam.ca/en/documents/sila-fable-about-climate-change, https://www.puq.ca/catalogue/livres/sila-kalaalliit-unikkaatuanga-silarjuami-silaup-asijjipallianinganuangajuq-4042.html, and https://inuit.uqam.ca/en/documents/sila-kalaalliit-unikkaatuanga-silarjuami-silaup-asijjipallianinganuangajuq.

13. Interview with Marie-Odile Junker

14. Interview with René Lemieux

15. https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1149503/langue-anichinabe-ecole-migwan-pikogan

16. https://biblesociety.ca/project/canada-indigenous-languages-bible-translation/

After the Bible, the most translated book in the world (all languages considered) is *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.[17] The tale has been translated into Anishinaabemowin in the United States,[18] into Aymara (an Indigenous language spoken in Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina),[19] as well as into Tsotsil (Mexico).[20] It is now being translated into Innu-aimun by Yvette Mollen in Quebec.[21]

When it comes to translation **from Indigenous languages**, texts intended for adults are few and far between.

A number of anthropologists have translated—or more likely had others translate—some of the stories, tales and legends entrusted to them by Indigenous people. The name of the translator does not always appear on these works as prominently as it does on translations today.[22] (Publications now usually include the translator's name on the front cover, title page, or back cover.)

Two autobiographically-inspired works written in Innu-aimun by An Antane Kapesh—*Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu* and *Tanite nene etutamin nitassi?*—have been translated into French by José Mailhot as *Je suis une maudite sauvagesse* and *Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays?*[23] These works were then translated from French into English by Sarah Henzi as *I Am a Damn Savage* and *What Have You Done to My Country?*[24]

Another autobiographically-inspired work of fiction written in Inuktitut by Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk—*Sanaaq*—was translated into French by anthropologist Bernard Saladin d'Anglure and published in 2002.[25] It was then translated from French into English by Peter Frost and published in 2014.[26]

In Quebec, most of the literary translation **from or into Indigenous languages** falls within the realm of children's literature.

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17. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Prince#:~:text=The%20book%20has%20been%20translated,published%2C%20trailing%20only%20the%20Bible and https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/the-little-prince
18. https://ojibwe.net/ogimaans-the-little-prince-book/
19. https://globalvoices.org/2016/05/20/saint-exuperys-little-prince-can-speak-aymara-now/
20. https://globalvoices.org/2018/11/28/the-little-prince-now-speaks-tsotsil/
21. Inge Genee, Monica Macaulay and Margaret Noodin (eds.), *Papers of the Fifty-Third Algonquian Conference / Actes du cinquante-troisième Congrès des Algonquinistes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2024), 138.
22. In the case of Serge Bouchard's book *Récits de Mathieu Mestokosho, chasseur innu*, the translation is attributed in the foreword to Georges Mestokosho: "Mathieu Mestokosho spoke only Innu. . . In 1975, while I was working with Georges on the translation of his stories, he told me that his father spoke the language of the Elders admirably, and that the language was as beautiful as music from the depths of time and space." (translated from the French) Serge Bouchard, *Récits de Mathieu Mestokosho, chasseur innu* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal, 2004), 17.
23. See https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/cah/2022-n18-cah07297/1092362ar/. These two works were reissued recently by the publisher Mémoire d'encrier. https://memoiredencrier.com/catalogue/je-suis-une-maudite-sauvagesse-eukuan-nin-matshi-manitu-innushkueu/ and https://memoiredencrier.com/catalogue/quas-tu-fait-de-mon-pays-tanite-nene-etutamin-nitassi/
24. https://www.wlupress.wlu.ca/Books/I/I-Am-a-Damn-Savage-What-Have-You-Done-to-My-Country-Eukuan-nin-matshi-manitu-innushkueu-Tanite-nene-etutamin-nitassi
25. https://publicationsnunavik.com/book/sanaaq/ and https://uofmpress.ca/books/sanaaq
26. https://inuit.uqam.ca/en/documents/sanaaq-inuit-novel

Publisher Les éditions du soleil de minuit, for example, produces bilingual or trilingual illustrated books for children in French and/or English and in the Indigenous language relevant to the story, i.e., Innu-aimun, Cree, Inuktitut or Gitxsanimax (Western Canada).[27]

Soleil de minuit published a book in 2000, *Albin visite les autochtones*, which includes a page in the language of each of the eleven First Nations living in Quebec. The translations are by Brigitte St-Onge (Montagnais), Mary Jane Petawabano (Cree), Martha Niquay (Atikamekw), Frances Mowatt (Algonquin), Monique Nolett-Ille (Abenaki), Frank Jacobs (Mohawk), Michel Gros-Louis (Wendat), Diane Mitchell and Eunice Metallic (Mi'kmaq), Anne Archambault (Maliseet), Philip Einish (Naskapi), and Sarah Beaulne (Inuktitut).[28]

Hannenorak, a Wendat press, publishes many Indigenous authors writing in French, or writing in English and translated into French, but also releases illustrated books written or translated in part in an Indigenous language. Hannenorak published several books by Sylvain Rivard between 2014 and 2020 on First Nations clothing, as part of its Documentaire jeunesse series. The books were issued in three languages: French, English, and an Indigenous language—Wolastoqey (translation by Allan Tremblay), Anishinaabemowin (Roger Wylde), Inuktitut (Talasia Tulugak), Mi'kmaq (Joe Wilmot), Abenaki (Philippe Charland), Cree (Linda Visitor), Innu (Hélène St-Onge), and Mohawk (Wahiakeron George Gilbert).[29]

The creative collective Un livre à la fois publishes books written and illustrated by students. Young people from Nuvviti School in Ivujivik, Quebec produced a bilingual Inuktitut-French book, ᐃᓄᐃᔪᓕᖅ / L'inugagullirq, in 2023.[30] They created another book, which was published in Inuktitut-French and Inuktitut-English in 2024: ᓄᓇᐅᓂ ᒪᓇᓂᖏᑦ / L'oeuf de la terre and ᓄᓇᐅᓂ ᒪᓇᓂᖏᑦ / The Earth Egg.[31] These books have been made available to the general public by Un livre à la fois and the Laboratoire international de recherche sur l'imaginaire du Nord, de l'hiver et de l'Arctique (Imaginaire | Nord), as part of its Isberg series.

Finally, various publishers put out books that include a few words in an Indigenous language, such as in the title,[32] as well as a glossary providing readers with their meaning and pronunciation.[33]

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27. Interview with Diane Groulx; see also https://www.editions-soleildeminuit.com/album-illustre.

28. Julie R. Bélanger, *Albin visite les autochtones* (Saint-Damien-de-Brandon, Quebec: Les éditions du soleil de minuit, 2000). (out of print)

29. https://editions.hannenorak.com/categories/documentaire-jeunesse/

30. Students from Nuvviti School, ᐃᓄᐃᔪᓕᖅ / *L'inugagullirq*, (Montreal: Un livre à la fois in collaboration with the Laboratoire international de recherche sur l'imaginaire du Nord, de l'hiver et de l'Arctique, Isberg series, 2023). See https://nord.uqam.ca/index.php/publication/inugagulliq-linugagullirq; see also https://projet-unlivrealafois.uqam.ca/editions-2023-linugagullirq/ and https://projet-unlivrealafois.uqam.ca/.

31. https://projet-unlivrealafois.uqam.ca/edition-2024-loeuf-de-la-terre/ and https://projet-unlivrealafois.uqam.ca/edition-2024-the-earth-egg/

32. See, for example, in the area of children's literature: Maude Ostiguy-Lauzon, *Unikaangit : légendes inuites*, Hannenorak, 2019, https://editions.hannenorak.com/catalogue/unikaangit-legendes-inuites/; Daniel Beauvais, *Ajurnamat! On n'y peut rien!*, Les Éditions du soleil de minuit, 2002. See also, in adult literature: Jean Sioui, *Yändata' : L'éternité au bout de ma rue* (récits), Mémoire d'encrier, 2021.

33. See, for example, *8tlokaw8ganal / Légendes*, written by Nicole O'Bomsawin and published by Hannenorak, which includes a glossary of the Abenaki words appearing in the text. https://editions.hannenorak.com/catalogue/8tlokaw8ganal-legendes/

4. From, into, between, and…

There are other language configurations involved in the translation from, into and between Indigenous languages published by Quebec presses.

Some authors interweave their Indigenous language with the French, or place the two languages side by side. This is true, for example, of Innu poets Rita Mestokosho[34] and Joséphine Bacon,[35] who write in either French or their Indigenous language and self-translate into the other.

Some presses publish relay translations of Indigenous authors[36]—such as Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, with their Jardin de givre series—or reissue, in a single work, the original text in the author's Indigenous language and a relay translation from a language in which the author also wrote and published the work.[37]

In a word, literary translation from, into and between Indigenous languages in Quebec remains sporadic and falls primarily within the scope of children's literature. The types of challenges affecting the development of Indigenous translation are discussed in the following section, along with a number of ways in which this translation could be fostered.

34. See, for example, *Atikᵘ utei. Le cœur du caribou*, Mémoire d'encrier, 2023: https://memoiredencrier.com/catalogue/atiku-utei-le-coeur-du-caribou/. For an excerpt, see https://memoiredencrier.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/11d1cd22ca30225dfee630fa7caa1d483abe9c.pdf.

35. All of Joséphine Bacon's poetry collections are published in French and Innu-aimun by Mémoire d'encrier: https://memoiredencrier.com/auteurs/josephine-bacon/.

36. This is true, for example, of Aqqaluk Lynge, *Des veines du cœur au sommet de la pensée*, translated into French by Catherine Ego from the English version (itself translated from the original Danish by Marianne Stenbaek, in collaboration with Ken Norris and the author), https://www.puq.ca/catalogue/livres/des-veines-coeur-sommet-pensee-2348.html; https://r.cantook.com/enqc/sample/aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZW50cmVwb3RudW1lcmlxdWUuY29tL3NhbXBsZS8xMzgwNC93ZWJfcmVhZGVyX21hbmlmZXN0P2Zvcm1hd-F9uYXR1cmU9cGRmJnNpZ2lkPTE2ODc5MjM2OTImc2InbmF0dXJlPTFmZjBkMmZlMDVlMDViYzkwYjQ1ODAwMzNkNjBkZTAzNGFkOTExZ-jEwMGRkNWVhY2VlOTAxYmE2YWU0OWVmYTQ.

37. For example, Markoosie Patsauq's *Harpoon of the Hunter*, written originally in Inuktitut, was also written/translated by the author in English, then translated from English into French by Catherine Ego. See https://nord.uqam.ca/publication/le-harpon-du-chasseur.

II. Typology of Challenges

On the basis of the interviews conducted and the other sources consulted for this study, different types of challenges in publishing literary translations from and into Indigenous languages have been identified. These challenges include language-related issues, Indigenous people's relationship with the written word, the funding of translations, the training and availability of translators, the specificity of translation from or into an Indigenous language, as well as cultural and political concerns.

1. Language-related challenges

a. Endangered languages

In Quebec, as throughout Canada, Indigenous languages are in a precarious situation.

Kanien'kéha (Mohawk), Abenaki, Wendat, and Wolastoqey (Maliseet) have survived, at least in the form of archival writings, but are now severely endangered.

Be that as it may, several Indigenous languages are still spoken on a daily basis, including Inuktitut,[38] Innu-aimun, Atikamekw, Cree and, to a lesser extent, Anishinaabemowin.[39] In the case of Atikamekw, over 90% of members in the three Atikamekw communities (Manawan, Wemotaci and Opitciwan) are still fluent in the language and speak it regularly, but use it in written exchanges to a lesser degree. Nonetheless, according to Nicole Petiquay, a growing number of young people are communicating in Atikamekw on social networks. She said that she even sees a number of non-Indigenous people using a few Atikamekw words in their posts, likely with the help of tools that she herself largely contributed to developing (see the paragraph below).

38. Inuktitut (34,110) was by far the most frequently reported mother tongue in the Inuit language family. Those who reported Inuktitut as their mother tongue reside mainly in Nunavut or Quebec. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_3-eng.cfm

39. "In Quebec, the Aboriginal languages most frequently reported as mother tongues were the Cree languages, Inuktitut, Innu/Montagnais and Atikamekw." Ibid.

b. Considerable revitalization and preservation efforts

Although Atikamekw is still alive and well in the communities, the number of books published in the language can be counted on one hand, with the noteworthy exception of the online and hard-copy linguistic resources co-edited by Nicole Petiquay and Marie-Odile Junker and published by the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw. These resources include an Atikamekw-French dictionary, a French-Atikamekw dictionary, an Atikamekw-French thematic dictionary,[40] and a French-Atikamekw conversation manual.[41] An Atikamekw grammar book is presently being written. As mentioned, several glossaries and dictionaries were produced by missionaries and remain useful to linguists today.

When it comes to Innu-aimun, Marjolaine Tshernish indicated that a verb conjugation guide was recently published.[42] She said the Innu are the nation that has developed the largest number of language transmission tools in Canada, including a dictionary with over 30,000 words, as well as grammatical and other online resources.[43] Institut Tshakapesh, whose mission is to preserve and promote Innu culture, also publishes books in Innu-aimun for preschoolers and young people.

In both Atikamekw and Innu-aimun, linguists are continually working to expand dictionaries by recovering words from the archives and the elders, and by inventing new words for relatively recent developments, such as the computer and the Internet. In the case of Innu-aimun, a committee representing several Innu communities meets with linguists every week. For "computer," they decided on a word that means "a device that you look at." Speakers of Atikamekw also meet with linguists to keep broadening the communities' linguistic knowledge. To refer to the "Internet," for example, they settled on a word that means "it goes over the trees." In Cree, as Marie-Odile Junker pointed out, a "smartphone" is a "small device to distract" and an individual freezer, a "miser's box" (as opposed to the traditional community freezer).

Despite these productive and praiseworthy efforts, Indigenous languages in Quebec and the rest of Canada, like all languages in a minority situation, are under strong pressure from the majority languages—French in Quebec, and increasingly English, which dominates websites, social networks and video games. A number of the people interviewed, as well as linguist Jimena Terraza—a specialist in Algonquian languages and a professor at Kiuna College for First Nations[44]—emphasized the detrimental effect of video games on the preservation of minority languages, especially Indigenous languages, among young people.

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40. https://www.langueatikamekw.ca/dictionnaire/livres/

41. https://atlas-ling.ca/pdf/ATIKAMEKW_Manuel_Conversation.pdf; also available online through the Atlas linguistique algonquien at https://www.atlas-ling.ca/?locale=fra and the Algonquin Linguistic Atlas at https://www.atlas-ling.ca/?locale=eng.

42. https://atautshuap.tshakapesh.ca/products/aitun-mashinaikan-guide-de-conjugaison-des-verbes-innus-vol-1-et-vol-2; see also https://verb.innu-aimun.ca/.

43. https://www.innu-aimun.ca/blog/

44. You can listen, for example, to Jimena Terraza's interview in French on *Confluents* at https://open.spotify.com/episode/1s8As2T0yjZ6oXgvFUhvHI.

Elisapie Lamoureux, a young Inuit from Ivujivik, pointed out that young people in Nunavik in Northern Quebec are torn between three languages: Inuktitut, which is in many cases their mother tongue; French, which is the language of instruction in some of the schools in Nunavik's fourteen villages; and English, which is so prevalent on the Internet. She believes that Inuktitut is endangered because of French and English, but also because the elders, who have a better command of the language, often criticize young people for their mistakes and their borrowings from French and English. In her view, the elders are contributing to young people's insecurity about language by demanding a level of proficiency that has become unattainable in childhood and adolescence. Instead of encouraging young folks to put more effort into Inuktitut, the elders are pushing them toward French and English—languages they master better than their elders and that provide them with a sense of success rather than failure.

c. Dialects

Because Indigenous communities are very spread out—in some cases located hundreds of kilometres apart—most Indigenous languages have a number of dialects. The Inuktitut spoken in Ungava Bay is different from that spoken in Hudson Bay; both can be divided into several dialects. According to Adamie Kalingo, four Inuktitut dialects are spoken in Nunavik alone. Not all Inuit agree on the approach that should be taken to this dialectal diversity. Some believe it would be better to standardize the language, to strengthen it in relation to the majority languages—French and English. Others think that such diversity constitutes cultural and linguistic richness that far outweighs any disadvantages it might represent.

Nicole Petiquay, a guardian of the Atikamekw language, added that each of the three Atikamekw communities in Quebec—Manawan, Wemotaci and Opitciwan—has its own dialectal variation, depending on the other Indigenous communities with which it is in contact (for example, the Cree and the Innu in the case of Opitciwan; the Anishinaabe in the case of Wemotaci). She specified, however, that such variation is not so pronounced as to prevent the communities from understanding one another or to hinder the work of linguists.

The Innu-aimun written language has now been standardized. This process, which took some twenty years, involved language specialists and speakers—primarily women—who worked with a team of linguists. Now that the corpus of language resources is well established, variants can be included in the dictionary. Here again, the language differences between communities are not so pronounced as to prevent members from understanding one another, except perhaps younger people: students from one community may have difficulty understanding those from another.

This dialectal diversity has a very real impact on translation and publishing. As Diane Groulx, founder and executive director of Les éditions du soleil de minuit pointed out, if the translator and those reviewing the translation (revising/editing, proofreading, etc.) are not from the same community, dialectal differences may be introduced at each stage of the process, against the preceding professional's wishes. Since publishers do not necessarily master the language in question, it's impossible for them to resolve the issue. Any discrepancies can jeopardize the consistency of the translations published. They can also create dissension between language professionals, at a time when publishers are struggling to set up teams in the appropriate language combinations because competent resources are still rare and in high demand (see "Severe shortage of language specialists" below).

2. Relationship with the written word

Indigenous languages are often thought to be strictly oral, but not all experts agree on this point. Some experts refer to forms of expression that are neither alphabetic nor syllabic but that, in their view, constitute writings all the same. These include, for example, territorial and topographical markers, such as the inuksuit made by the Inuit and the message sticks used by the Innu.

It's nonetheless true that Quebec's Indigenous cultures do not have a very long book tradition *per se*. Diane Groulx revealed that she approaches Inuit authors regularly about writing texts in Inuktitut, but to little avail. In her view, this may be due to the fact that writing is still viewed by most Inuit as an academic or administrative activity. In other words, writing has not yet become fully established as a form of literary expression, let alone as an individual creative endeavour.

In societies that place greater importance on the community than the individual, the tales, myths and legends that they tell and pass on have naturally formed the basis of their oral literature. The transition from oral to written literature thus began with the transcription of these stories. Even *Harpoon of the Hunter* by Markoosie Patsauq, often referred to as the first Inuit novel, was based on a legend from the oral tradition.

Despite the lack of a long book tradition, fiction writing is becoming more and more established in some communities, in particular among the Innu: writers like Joséphine Bacon, Rita Mestokosho, Naomi Fontaine, J. D. Kurtness and Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine, for example, have even earned enviable international reputations.[45] Literature written by the Inuit has also developed noticeably over the years.[46] In other communities, however, fiction writing is not very common, especially in an Indigenous language.

3. Funding of translations

As Diane Groulx of Soleil de minuit pointed out, translating a book is a long and costly process. The Canada Council for the Arts program, Arts Across Canada, now funds literary translation into Indigenous languages.[47] In the area of non-fiction, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences program,

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45. For more on this subject, see Myrian St-Gelais, *Une histoire de la littérature et nous* (Montreal and Uashat: Laboratoire international de recherche sur l'imaginaire du Nord, de l'hiver et de l'Arctique (directed by Daniel Chartier) and Institut Tshakapesh (directed by Marjolaine Tshernish), 2002. You can also listen to an interview with Myriam St-Gelais in French on *Confluents* at https://open.spotify.com/episode/5nHDrk5YYIcgioYJEghI78.

46. See, for example, Nelly Duvicq, *Histoire de la littérature inuite du Nunavik* (Presses de l'Université du Quebec/Imaginaire Nord, Droit au Pôle series, 2019). You can also listen to an interview in French at https://open.spotify.com/episode/3uwVIM7RIae3wSf0GTktUu.

47. https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/arts-across-canada/translation

the Scholarly Book Awards (formerly the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program or ASPP), now funds the translation of a work from or into a Canadian Indigenous language each year.[48]

Without this support, the translation of a lengthy work of literature—children's or adult—into an Indigenous language would not be economically feasible because of the limited market for books in these languages. It would also be difficult to sell the rights for these translations abroad (unlike certain French translations produced in Quebec and the rest of Canada, for which the rights can be sold to other French-speaking countries).

Soleil de minuit therefore limits its translations into Indigenous languages to illustrated books, which contain few words. Hannenorak, a Wendat publishing house specializing in Indigenous literature, also chooses to publish only illustrated books translated from or into Indigenous languages. Publishing a lengthy work in two languages (French or English and an Indigenous language) doubles the number of pages and thus has a considerable impact on production costs. Illustrated books contain few words, and the two languages can usually be printed on the same page. The cost of producing a bilingual illustrated book is therefore almost the same as that of a monolingual work, except for the cost of translation.

4. Severe shortage of language specialists

A number of the interviewees, in particular Marjolaine Tshernish, Marie-Odile Junker and Diane Groulx, reported the serious shortage of translators and linguists working in one or more Indigenous languages.

There is presently only one translator training program in an Indigenous language in Quebec. The Cégep de Sept-Îles offers an Innu-aimun translation and interpretation program leading to an Attestation of College Studies (ACS).[49] The program, which has just been set up, has trained a single cohort of a dozen students so far. All of the students were hired after graduation, but only for translation of general/specialized texts: technical material, healthcare information, legal advice, and documents for school boards and schools, band councils, and teams negotiating with the governments.

The Cégep de Sept-Îles program nonetheless constitutes an absolutely remarkable first. Linguists and other Innu-aimun language specialists have emphasized the quality of the training received by the students. However, the fact that the courses are given in person seems to pose an obstacle for potential applicants living far from Uashat (the Innu community near Sept-Îles). Distance courses are now being considered, to bridge the gap with Innu communities scattered across the region and with Innu students living in large urban centres in southern Quebec.

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48. https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policy/scholarly-book-awards. For the guidelines for this funding, see https://www.federationhss.ca/sites/default/files/2024-02/PAES-lignes-directrices-et-formulaire-de-demande-traduction-pour-auteurs-miseajour.docx.

49. https://cecsi.ca/attestation-detudes-collegiales-aec/nos-programmes/traducteur-interprete-en-langue-innue/

Marjolaine Tshernish explained that translators working from or into Innu-aimun are fully booked with general and specialized translation, particularly for government agencies. Those who might be interested in translating literary texts can do so only in their spare time, because it's less lucrative and the volume of work is less predictable.

Every literary translation project requires not only a translator, but considerable human resources for the review process (revising/editing, proofreading, and so on). Recruiting such resources, skilled in the right language combinations, can be difficult.

Even if the translation resources were available, literary translation is not necessarily a priority for the communities themselves. Marie-Odile Junker, a specialist in Algonquian languages, pointed out that legal and medical translation and interpretation are much more important to the communities than literary translation at this juncture. Their priority is to produce the necessary documents to inform accused persons of their rights and the steps in the legal process, to help patients better understand their illness and the treatments they are offered, and so on.

To meet such needs for legal and medical translation, certain steps have been taken. Institut Tshakapesh, commissioned by the Quebec Ministère de la Justice, has compiled bilingual legal glossaries (French-Innu-aimun and English-Innu-aimun).[50] Culturally and linguistically safe services have been set up at certain hospitals, such as services in Atikamekw in La Tuque, following the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan.

Waseskinokwe Eva Ottawa, an Atikamekw lawyer, also stressed the importance of language in understanding the legal framework and everyday realities surrounding adoption, for example. The term "custom adoption" or "customary adoption" does not have an equivalent in Atikamekw and is therefore not well understood by Atikamekw speakers. For this reason, when carrying out her research on the adoption of children in her community, she felt strongly about conducting her interviews in Atikamekw.[51]

Obviously, the above-mentioned legal and medical translation and/or interpretation initiatives monopolize numerous translators and other language specialists for months at a time, thus reducing the resources available for literary translation.

To foster literary translation from and into Innu-aimun, Marjolaine Tshernish suggested a number of ideas. These include training translators, promoting the profession, and ensuring stable incomes so that translators can support themselves and their families.

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50. https://www.tshakapesh.ca/langue/

51. Waseskinokwe Eva Ottawa, *Wactenamakanicic e opikihakaniwitc. L'adoption coutumière chez les Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok de Manawan* (Quebec City: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2023).

While a translator does not necessarily need a degree in translation, Marie-Odile Junker believes that the lack of accreditation frameworks in translation from and into Indigenous languages—with the exception of the Cégep de Sept-Îles program—significantly hinders the development of the profession. The shortage of translation resources for all Indigenous languages in Quebec is severe. Diane Groulx mentioned that it was exceedingly difficult to find translators into Wendat for *Albin chez les Autochtones*, which includes a page in each of Quebec's eleven Indigenous languages. Although Wendat is the subject of major revitalization efforts, there are no native speakers left.[52] For the publisher, Soleil de minuit, translating the page into Wendat required long dives in the archives. The translation into Maliseet (Wolastoqey) posed similar difficulties. Generally speaking, translators from and into Inuktitut, Cree, Atikamekw and Innu-aimun seem to be less rare, but are all in great demand, as mentioned, for general and specialized translation, which is primarily governmental.

At this point in time, competent people for translation, terminology checking, revising/editing and proofreading are usually found through contacts or by word of mouth. Publishers must therefore rely on their connections, and hope that the specialists they know will have time to devote to their projects.

5. Specificity of translation

As Diane Groulx emphasized, translation from or into an Indigenous language ultimately requires a great deal of time—time to seek, contact and talk with potential translators, and to check the competence, professionalism and credibility of potential language partners. It also requires a goodly amount of acceptance: the publisher doesn't always have the means to conduct a thorough review of the translation submitted and must rely on the translator's judgment when it comes to dialectal variation.

For French-language publishers, Cree and Inuktitut pose an added challenge. English is the first or second language of most of these speakers. Consequently, texts to be translated from the original Cree or Inuktitut into French—or from the original French into Cree or Inuktitut—must first, in some cases, be translated into English.

As far as translation difficulties *per se* are concerned, the interviews revealed a wide gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous languages and cultures. Indigenous peoples are very familiar with the "White man's" world, through their direct contact with it or through the media, but the opposite is not the case. This imbalance necessarily affects the approach taken to translation.

Marie-Odile Junker pointed out that Indigenous languages are verbal. She reported that verbs account for 80% of the Atikamekw language, for example, whereas nouns make up 60% of French, as appearing

52. https://languewendat.com/en/revitalisation/; https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/wendat-language-wendake-revitalization-1.5375926

in *Le Petit Robert*. Atikamekw expresses a more active, fluid and dynamic perspective. The Atikamekw world is not inhabited by virtually unchanging things, but by dynamic realities. As a result, people translating from French into Atikamekw sometimes choose to rework the French text, replacing all the nouns with verbs before they begin translating, to ensure that the Atikamekw text is fluid. This is particularly important, since the Atikamekw language is subject to daily "contamination" from the French-speaking world, given its geographical proximity. Over the years, it has come to rely increasingly on nouns, like French, and less and less on verbs, which are nonetheless more idiomatic.

Another translation difficulty is the fact that some concepts are foreign to Indigenous traditions and life today. The interviewees mentioned that sanctions, pardons, house arrest and apologies, for example, are alien to the Indigenous concept of justice, as is "sustainable development" in environmental management.

Siaja Mark Mangiuk, from Ivujivik, has translated dialogue for films. She explained that, since the Inuit are extremely modest, she cannot refer to any body part or sexual act when translating characters' anger or contempt into Inuktitut. She has, nonetheless, had difficulty convincing filmmakers to dispense with such profanities in the Inuktitut version of their scripts. Such adaptations are clearly somewhat inherent in the translation process. However, with the non-Inuit having a lesser knowledge of the Inuit than vice versa, it can be challenging to translate texts that fully render the original French or English, without offending Inuit sensibilities or sounding unidiomatic in Inuktitut.

Sexologist and social worker Mélanie Jourdain Michel pointed out that there is no equivalent in Innu-aimun for the word "sexuality." Thus, in the social work she carries out among the Innu, she has to be more precise and speak of specific practices rather than sexuality in general.[53]

Nicole Petiquay mentioned that the Atikamekw language is intrinsically poetic. For example, the word "lake" in Atikamekw is literally "that which is adored," the word "computer," "machine that has a memory." She chuckled when recounting that she had been approached to translate poetry into Atikamekw. She asked, "How do you translate poetry into poetry?"

All in all, most of the interviewees stressed that it is "impossible" to translate certain texts or ideas from or into Indigenous languages. Still, despite the cultural gap between, say, Japan and the French-speaking world or the English-speaking world and Madagascar, people still manage to translate from Japanese into French and from English into Malagasy. The impression that translation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous languages is "impossible" may be due to the fact that so few texts have been translated and that the translation space remains largely unexplored. As this situation changes, so too may the impression that such translation is impossible.

53. https://open.spotify.com/episode/6Oy8uK0qgGtKgK0zZ40Dwc

6. Cultural and political challenges

Some Indigenous people are reluctant to disseminate their cultural heritage beyond their community, for fear of being dispossessed as they have been of their ancestral lands.

Marie-Odile Junker stressed the extractive nature of certain AI applications, which appropriate the language resources that Indigenous people have made available to the public. These resources, patiently gathered by linguists and speakers, are transformed by AI into websites or applications that may be technologically and graphically impressive, but that circulate error-riddled language. Given the linguistic insecurity of speakers today, particularly young people, such erroneous language—often thought to be standard because it's disseminated by a credible-looking website or application—could prompt speakers to question their skills and those of their community, and ultimately to give up their language.

Marie-Odile Junker also condemned the extractive nature of certain university research projects, whose sole aim is to extract knowledge from Indigenous participants, without meeting their aspirations for the advancement of knowledge or ensuring that the community benefits from the research findings. René Lemieux also talked about extractivism, mentioning the myths and legends translated from Indigenous languages for anthropologists, who then incorporated them into their own books, without always indicating the source or the translator's name.

In light of these extractive tendencies, some Indigenous people may feel inclined to keep their linguistic knowledge as well as their myths, stories and narratives within their communities.

Diane Groulx reported that one Indigenous community in Quebec had contacted Les éditions du soleil de minuit about having its legends translated. It then decided to drop the project, opting to avoid disseminating its distinct heritage and to preserve its oral literature and language. This case is not unique: Diane Groulx also referred to a community in Western Canada that refused to disclose its stories and linguistic knowledge.

It should be mentioned that some Indigenous people approached by Les éditions du soleil de minuit did not wish to write down their legends, but were willing to tell them, and agreed to have them written down and published.

Marjolaine Tshernish indicated that many elders in the Innu community are currently writing their life stories, but do not necessarily want them to be published by a non-Innu press. Institut Tshakapesh would likely be the publisher of choice in their case, provided it can find the editing resources essential for any manuscript.

Conclusion

The people interviewed for this study do not feel that literary translation from, into and between Indigenous languages is a real priority at this time. In their view, there are two language-related issues that are urgent for Indigenous communities.

First, it is imperative for Indigenous people to have the option of accessing basic services in their own language, particularly when it comes to the healthcare and justice systems. In this respect, general and specialized translation should be given precedence over literary translation.

Second, since most Indigenous languages are now in a precarious situation and subject to tremendous pressure every day from the majority languages—French and English—it's essential that all the linguistic data available be gathered, particularly from the elders and the archives. This information should be organized and preserved in various documents—glossaries, lexicons, dictionaries, grammar books, conversation manuals, etc.—to help ensure that the languages survive, regardless of what happens to their speakers. Philippe Charland, the current leading expert on the Abenaki language—presently spoken by very few people—is delighted that there are now documents enabling the language to be revived in the near or distant future, even if all the speakers were to disappear.[54]

While the archives can theoretically be preserved, the memories of the elders are fading, and the elders themselves are dying. Gathering information from them is thus undeniably urgent. Elders are the guardians of knowledge, not only about the language, but about the land and the traditional way of life. This knowledge sheds light on the archives, the stories, the glossaries and the lexicons of the past. What would be the point of knowing the Indigenous word for a tool, if no one knows what the tool was used for?

All in all, literary translation from, into and between Indigenous languages remains irregular or sporadic. Although the promotion of this translation is certainly a fascinating endeavour, the imminent development thereof seems unlikely for the reasons discussed: lack of a corpus of literature in Indigenous languages; shortage of specialists in these languages; financial challenges; desire to keep knowledge within the communities; and so on.

While it's certainly worth asking what might be the best way to promote literary translation from, into and between Indigenous languages, it's also important to ask why we should do it at all.

Why translate texts written in French or English into Indigenous languages? Most Indigenous people

54. https://open.spotify.com/episode/2fuCL6r6jraZAbEp7wqUxD

are fluent in French or English. What would be the purpose of translating non-Indigenous works into Indigenous languages, given the extraordinary demographic and political imbalance between the two worlds? Would it be to introduce a non-Indigenous world view into Indigenous languages? Whether incidental or deliberate, cultural colonialism represents a danger that cannot be overlooked.

Conversely, why translate texts written in an Indigenous language into French or English? Non-Indigenous readers would certainly be very eager to discover this literature. However, before any translation is undertaken and circulated outside the communities in question, it would be advisable to ensure that this is really what the communities want. Extractivism constitutes a second danger that must be duly considered.

This is not about taking a stand against literary translation from, into and between Indigenous languages, but about bearing in mind that such translation has consequences and about reflecting on the reasons for doing it and the potential impact.

There is a growing interest in Indigenous languages. Today, even the general public knows at least a few Indigenous words and understands what French and English have borrowed from these languages.[55] But is translation the best way of protecting them? Given the current state of the corpus of literature in Indigenous languages and the realities of life in the communities, wouldn't the priority be to encourage oral and written expression in these languages?[56] The importance of such an initiative would be linguistic, since it would contribute to preserving and revitalizing these languages, but it would also be cultural in a broader sense: oral storytelling and writing convey not only language, but a singular understanding of everyday life and of connection with others and the universe. Yet these Indigenous world views are declining, and they recede further every time an elder dies. Indigenous people, young and old, must, as a matter of urgency, tell their own stories.

55. Denis Vaugeois, Louis Tardivel and Louise Côté provide, in *L'Indien généreux* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal, 1992), an inventory of Indigenous words and concepts that have enriched languages of European origin.

56. Nelly Duvicq mentioned that Inuit literature has developed considerably thanks to programs and initiatives, particularly governmental, aimed at encouraging people in Northern villages to write. Ibid

Appendix

Individuals Interviewed

The individuals interviewed for this study are listed below. Other sources—both interviews and documents—were also used and are mentioned in the text.

Language: Inuktitut (Ivujivik, Nunavik)

Adamie Kalingo – Author, village mayor and language analyst

Elisapie Lamoureux – Young Inuit leader, special education teacher at Nuvviti School in Ivujivik, and member of Qarjuit Youth Council

Siaja Mark Mangiuk – Translator and Inuktitut teacher at Nuvviti School in Ivujivik, recipient of the 2017 Indspire Guiding the Journey: Indigenous Educator Award

Nelly Duvicq – French teacher at Nuvviti School in Ivujivik for the Kativik School Board, and author of *Histoire de la littérature inuite du Nunavik* (Presses de l'Université du Québec/Imaginaire Nord, Droit au Pôle series, 2019)

Language: Innu-aimun

Marjolaine Tshernish – Executive Director of Institut Tshakapesh, an organization working to protect and promote Innu-aitun (Innu culture and way of life) and Innu-aimun (Innu language)

Language: Atikamekw

Nicole Petiquay – "Guardian of the Atikamekw language," language coordinator for the Council for the Atikamekw Nation, and recipient of the 2022 Prix de la valorisation des langues autochtones awarded by the Université de Montréal

All Indigenous languages

Marie-Odile Junker – Linguist and linguistics professor at Carleton University in Ottawa; co-creator of several websites and online dictionaries for languages in the Algonquian family (Cree, Innu, Atikamekw) and of the *Algonquian Linguistic Atlas*; and recipient of the Governor General's Innovation Award in 2017

Diane Groulx – Founder and executive director of the publishing company Les éditions du soleil de minuit

René Lemieux – Translation professor in the Département d'Études françaises at Concordia University (focusing on Indigenous languages, literature and culture); director of the Indigenous Translation Observatory; member of the Centre de recherche sur les théories et les pratiques de l'imaginaire Figura; member of the Awikhiganisaskak Project aimed at documenting and revitalizing Quebec's Indigenous languages, in particular Abenaki

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Catherine Ego

Translated from the French by Elaine Kennedy