Philological Spadework in the Jesuit Relations:
A Letter in Algonquin

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The Jesuit Relations (in French Relations des Jésuites) is a collection of 41 volumes of reports from the Jesuit missions in Canada to the Jesuit superiors in Paris, published annually from 1632 to 1673 in Paris by the publishing house of Sebastien Cramoisy, by appointment publisher to His Royal Highness the king of France. These volumes contained relations of the activities of the various missions located in Canada, written by Jesuits in the field and sent to the Superior in Quebec, who incorporated these accounts into his general account, along with any comments of his own on these subjects. These accounts contained many observations on the country, its flora and fauna, and especially its inhabitants, the native peoples of Canada.

The full title of each volume is, in French, Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année . . . , translated into English as Relation of What Occurred in New France in the Year . . . . The volumes are small, measuring approximately 10.5 by 17cm in outside measurement, with a print face of approximately 7 by 12.5cm. They range in length from approximately 150 to 300 pages. From all accounts, they were very popular and sold well to the general public, with frequent re impressions of the basic print-run, and a number of reprints (cf. McCoy 1972). I have no information as to the number of copies published in any one year, but it is conceivable that they ran into the thousands. Various complete sets of these in North America are reported, one owned by the Séminaire de Québec, and now housed at Laval University in Quebec City; another in the John Carter Brown Library of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island; a third in the Lennox Library collected by a well-known book collector in New York City in the late 19th century.
These published volumes, in addition to containing much information on the religion, social organization, physical condition, and other aspects of the Native peoples of the region where the Jesuits established their missions, also contain rich stores of information on the languages of these Native peoples. Beginning with Father Paul Le Jeune's famous chapter containing a thumb-nail grammatical sketch of the Montagnais language in the Relation for 1634 (Le Jeune 1635:21–33; cf. Cowan 1983) there are many comments made upon the languages that the Jesuits encountered — among them Montagnais, Algonquin, Huron, Iroquois, Western Abnaki, and perhaps others — many texts in these languages, both with and without translation into French, and many isolated words and sentences scattered throughout the narratives.

One such text is the subject of this communication. Published in the report for the years 1642 and 1643, which appeared in print in 1644 (Vimont 1644), it is a letter composed in Algonquin, a dialect of Ojibwa, by a native speaker of the language living at the mission in Sillery, about 2 leagues (= 9.6 km) from Quebec City. It was apparently dictated to Father Barthelemy Vimont, the head of the mission at that time and the author of this particular Relation, taken down by him in a transcription based on French spelling norms, and published with an interlinear French translation. It occurs on pages 56, 57 and 58 of the volume (and is reproduced in the Appendix to this article). The letter was addressed to a patron of the mission living in France, and announces the composer's thanks for what has been done for the Indians living in the mission, and asks for more aid. The name of neither the composer nor the recipient of the letter is mentioned, but apparently it was sent in addition to having been printed in the Relation.

Another thing about the letter that is not mentioned in the Relation is what language it is in. It occurs at the end of a chapter in which the settlement at Sillery is described. Vimont says that two different groups of native peoples live there; one is Montagnais, the other is Algonquin. However, in introducing the letter, Vimont says merely that it was composed by one of the Christian neophytes at the mission, without mentioning whether this person is a Montagnais or an Algonquin. Since the letter is clearly not Montagnais, it must be in Algonquin. However, various opinions as to the

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1 I would like to thank John Nichols, Richard Rhodes, and David Pentland for helpful comments. All errors and omissions remain my responsibility.
2 I have consulted the copy in the National Library of Canada, call number F5059.5 J4 V52 Reserve.
3 Lynn Drapeau and Marguerite MacKenzie (personal communications) both remarked that the language of the letter is much more comprehensible to someone familiar with Montagnais than is any modern dialect of Ojibwa, an observation
language of the letter have been put forth in later comment on this part of the Relation. Pilling (1891:512) in his Algonqian bibliography said the letter was in Ottawa, a dialect of Ojibwa different from Algonquin. Michelson, in a long footnote to an essay dealing with Montagnais dialectology (Michelson 1939:90–95), accepts the letter as being in Algonquin. Hanzeli (1969:59) in his 1969 analysis of missionary linguistics in New France mistakenly thought the letter was in Montagnais, a different language entirely from Ojibwa. And Trigger and Day (1978:792) in their article about the Algonquin in volume 15 of the Handbook of North American Indians of 1978 classify it as r-dialect Algonquin. This is not the place to delve into the torturous maze of Ojibwa dialectology, especially that of 350 years ago, and until further analysis shows otherwise, it is the better part of wisdom to assume that the Algonquin of 1643 is the precursor of the Algonquin of today, especially since most of the vocabulary items in the letter can be found in Lemoyne’s Dictionnaire français-algonquin of 1909.

Two significant complete reprints of the Jesuit Relations have been published since the originals of 1632–1673: the first was in 1858, edited by Augustin Côté and a committee of French Catholic priests, and published in three volumes in Quebec City by the government of Canada (Côté 1858). This edition was published in a photographic reprint in Montreal by Editions du Jour in 1972. With the exception of two misprints and the substitution of a few lower case letters where the original has capitals, the Algonquin text is reprinted exactly as it was in 1644. The French interlinear translation is more cavalierly handled. The punctuation of the original is not followed, and in a few places the spelling of the French is altered. For example, the word for ‘benefactor’ is bien-facteur in the original; this has been changed to bien-faïcteur in the 1858 edition. In the original, Father Le Jeune, the author of the Relation of 1632 is referred to as “P. Le Ieune”; in the 1858 reprint he is “Père le Îeune”.

The two misprints are: on line 6 of the original the word chaðerimien is spelled ohaðerimien, with o erroneously substituted for the the original c. And on line 14 of the original, the 8 of the word 8apmirang is omitted, giving apmirang.

The second important reprint was that published between 1896 and 1901, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, the secretary of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and published by the Burrows Brothers publishing firm in Cleveland (Thwaites 1959). This edition was given a photographic reprint in New York by Pageant Books in 1959. Thwaites’s reprint is entitled The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, and includes much more than the original Cramoisy series of 41 Jesuit Relations reprinted in 1858 in Quebec.

that suggests that Montagnais and Ojibwa were more similar to each other in 1644 than today.
Thwaites's work was a massive compilation of letters, reports, the *Jesuit Relations* of Cramoisy, and other material all issuing from the Jesuit missionary effort, and all bearing on the Jesuit and other Catholic missionary efforts in North America. It ran to 73 volumes, published in 36 actual books, since some books included more than one volume or parts of volumes. The letter in Algonquin appears in volume 24, pages 38–43, which was published in 1898.

In addition to including much more than the original Cramoisy series, the Thwaites reprint presents all the material in the original language — French, Latin, and occasionally Italian — with a facing English translation. It has become the standard reference for the *Jesuit Relations* in the world of English-speaking scholarship.

The letter in question is thus presented twice in the Thwaites edition: once with the original French interlinear translation of the Algonquin, and on facing pages in an English translation of this French, again as an interlinear translation of the Algonquin text. One significant difference between the Algonquin text in the French version and the Algonquin text in the English version is that the symbol 8 of the original, used by the French Jesuit missionaries to render a vowel and/or semi-vowel that was high and back and possibly unrounded (cf. Cowan 1981) is retained as such in the French version, but is rendered as w in prevocalic position, and as ou elsewhere in the English version. Apart from this, the two texts are identical, even to the emendations and misprints.

The Algonquin text in Thwaites differs from the text of the original 1644 edition in five places. Two of these are obvious emendations: in line 1 the word dich is an error for the correct wich that is correctly rendered in line 2. Thwaites has silently corrected it. And in line 6, the word Nassi- is an obvious error for the correct Massi- which is correctly rendered in line 9, again silently corrected by Thwaites. A third deviation from the 1644 text occurs in line 24, where Thwaites’s text eliminates a word space in the form rimia mint8a and renders it rimiiament8a. The remaining two deviations are apparently simple misprints on the part of Thwaites: in the first, on line 25, the original eak8siriti has a doubled t: eak8siritti. In the second, on line 33, the last a of the original nagatahant is rendered as u in Thwaites’s nagatahunt.

The two emendations made by Thwaites are not all the emendations that are possible in this text. I have found 11 forms that invite emendation, including the two made by Thwaites. They are as follows:4

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4See the reproduction of the original in the Appendix. The line numberings have been added here.

5In these examples, I compare the items from the 1644 text with two modern sources: Lemoine (1909), identified by the letter “L”, and Baraga (1966), identified
In his 1939 essay on Cree and Montagnais-Naskapi dialects, Michelson (1939:90–95) commented on some of the forms that occur in this letter. Unfortunately, he uses the symbol theta [θ] for the omicron-upsilon vowel sign used by the Jesuits which is normally rendered in modern times with the number 8. This can be a little disconcerting at times. Stating that the spelling of Algonquin has been influenced by that adopted for Montagnais, he observes that the letters th are used with the value usually associated with the letters tc, apparently [c], and quotes the form ninithanisak ‘mes enfans’ (l. 3) with th and the form Ninitchanis ‘mon enfant’ (l. 9) with tch as acceptable variants for the same sound rather than considering the th as a misprint. He compares this with Montagnais spellings ending in th such as attimoueth ‘chien’, varying with spellings such as khi, both presumably indicating an affricated or palatalized /k/: [kθ] or [ç]. This seems improbable. In the first place, the author of the Montagnais words quoted is Père Paul Le Jeune, not Père Barthelemy Vimont. There is little reason to suppose that Père Vimont, transcribing Algonquin, would have imitated Le Jeune,
who was transcribing Montagnais. A more plausible explanation is that the
\textit{c} of the form \textit{ninithanisak} was simply inadvertently omitted, either from
Vimont’s manuscript, or in the print shop, where French printers working
with an unfamiliar language, were probably doing as well as they could, but
were still liable to error.

Michelson also says that the sequence \textit{ti} was used with the value rep-
resented by the letters \textit{tc} (presumably \textit{[c]}) in the form quoted by Michelson
(1939:93) as \textit{c[sic]a8sitiik} ‘les malade [sic]’ (l. 28). In actual fact, the letter
\textit{i} was used for a palatal fricative, presumably \textit{[z]} in both Algonquin and in
French in forms like \textit{ie} ‘I’, spelled in modern French with the letter \textit{j}. This
value is also seen in the form \textit{peitik} ‘une’ (l. 20), which is spelled \textit{p{ё}jik} in
Lemoine. It is plausible, therefore, to assume that the sequence \textit{ti} would be
used to indicate a voiced \textit{[j]} as well as a voiceless \textit{[c]}.

Michelson also sees Montagnais graphic influence in the spelling \textit{khik8sis}
‘vostre fils’ (l. 10). This is more probable. The sequence \textit{kh} indicates affrica-
tion of the voiceless velar stop \textit{/k/} to \textit{[k*]} or \textit{[c]}, something that happened in
Montagnais but not in Algonquin. The second person prefix occurs several
times in the present document (cf. \textit{kimirir} ‘ie vous donne’ l. 7), and in all
cases but this it is spelled with \textit{k}, not \textit{kh}. The spelling \textit{kh} also shows up in
the word \textit{pechkhich} ‘tout apres’ (l. 18), only the first half of which occurs in

Michelson also points out the misprint \textit{nikachiipitagan} ‘mon sac a petun’
(l. 8), and correctly emends it to \textit{nikachkipitagan}.

The \textit{Jesuit Relations} continue to be a rich source on the languages of the
North American Indians in the 17th century. Further work, not only on the
Algonquian languages like Algonquin and Montagnais, but also on Iroquoian
languages like Huron, will be a welcome exploitation of this source.
§ 6 Relation de la Nouvelle France

Je croy qu'il ne sera pas mal à propos de fermer ce Chapitre par une lettre qu'un Neophyte Chrestien a dictée de soi-même pour estre envoyée en France, à un homme de consideration son bien-facteur, voyez ses propres termes & la façon de s'enoncer.

1 L'admire ce que vous faites, de ce que vous voulez
2 Nima katerindam ka tien, ka dich avoir pitié de moy, de ce que vous voulez avoir
3 chayerimien ka sich chayerimach pitié de ma femme & de mes enfans, nous ne sommes
4 Niu gaié ninithanisak Nikokyatiskimin pas capables de vous remercier, ecluy qui tout fait,
5 Ki nakumitang misli Ka Kichititch c'est ecluy qui vous payera : tous les iours nous prions
6 mi Ke kichikuk kachigakir kigagaryng pour vous, i'y dit au P. Vimont vues
7 tamyrimin Niura Pere Vimont Nairi-
8 vous: car je n'y attend rien : je vous donne
9 nahiket kir keta nikkerindan, kimirir mon sie a Petum: fut il ains qu'autre chose je vous
10 nikatchipiragan, kätira kotak nita mi- puissie donner: vousluy escriées, mon enfant
11 ritam kiga, maffinahamaga. Ninitchanis
12 Jaques qui fe nomme, remercier votre fils
13 Jaques ka irintch snakumar khigis"
A LETTER IN ALGONQUIN

en l'année 1642. & 1643.

Joseph qui est appelé il priera pour
Josephet ka irintch sga gagarganta. 11

Ivy. Vous faites bien de ce que vous voulez avoir
mayar. Kveratch entien kyic Chaye- 12

pitié de nous : fortement nous croyons fut-il ainsi que
rimiang synka niepetyamin kat nita 13

nous vous puissions voir en votre pays, nous nous
gapmirang endrakieg niga kichka- 14

verrons au Ciel : il vous expliquera tout
bantimin yakying kiga irtamakya 15

le Pen le Jeune, je suis comme demeurant
kakina P. le Jeune kynt nigintixemack 16

avec les filles de l'hôpital, ce n'est que comme une
ikyesensak kynt peiik mi-

maison tout auprès nous demeurons toujours
kigam peckkhich nit'apimin eapitch 18

je les honoreray, nous sommes bien aises
niga manatchihock, nimirgerindamin 19

de ce qu'il en est arrivé d'eux, vue qui est
Ninch ka, michagayatch peiik Ka 20

petite l'autre qui est grande
agachinchitch Kotak Ka Kinvitch 21

cela va bien de ce qu'elles sont arrivées, afin qu'elles
Kveratch Ka michagayatch itchi Ki-
nous enseignent & afin qu'elles ayent
kinohamayiamtynya gaie itchi chaye-
pitié de nous. Nous sommes bien aises de ce
rimia mintya. Nimirgerindamin ka 24

qu'elles ont compassion des malades car nous au-
chayerimagayatch eak'firitii Ketnamim- 25
58 Relation de la Nouvelle France,

26 n'ayant point cette coutume, nous avons
27 abandonnons nous autres, quelquefois nous estran-
28 commençons nous au temps ; voila pourquoi nous som-
29 mes bien aises de ce qu'elles sont arrivées ici les
30 rindamang ka michagasatch endoire ka
31 s'habillent de blanc depuis qu'elles sont arrivées c'est de-
32 Nous admirons de ce qu'elles ont quitté
33 leur pays, je suis âgé je ne puis plus
34 qu'au temps là qu'elles ont compassion de nous.
35 Nous admirons de ce qu'elles ont quitté
36 leurs pays, il est aisé je ne puis plus
37 m'ay-
38 m'ay-
39 dandoit à deficher la terre.
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