

Translation of French Residential School Documents

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About me

- ▶ French as first language
- ▶ Grew up in Kebec (Québec)
- ▶ Worked in community-based organisations in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), primarily in harm reduction
- ▶ In oskana kê-asastêki (Regina) since 2010
- ▶ Married into a family from the area around kistapinânihk (Prince-Albert), SK
- ▶ Studied Indigenous Studies and Cree Language Literacy at University of Regina
- ▶ Currently pursuing a master's of French and Francophone Intercultural Studies
- ▶ Started working as a research assistant on this project in September 2022

Why are so many documents in French?

- ▶ 60% of Indian Residential Schools were administered by the Catholic Church
- ▶ Most of these schools were administered by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a religious order then mostly present in France and in Québec
- ▶ The Oblates rarely taught - they brought orders of nuns focused on teaching and on missionary work
- ▶ They taught in English and worked alongside Indian agents and the Federal government
- ▶ They spoke French together, and with other members of the Catholic Church (Bishops, Archbishops, etc.)
- ▶ Their administrative and private documents were kept in French

What documents are we talking about?

- ▶ Official documents
 - ▶ Codex Historicus: notebook indicating who visits, and what the main events are
 - ▶ List of staff
- ▶ Formal letters
 - ▶ Requests for funding
- ▶ Journals
 - ▶ Personal documents showing daily life in the schools
 - ▶ Not really meant to be private

What we can expect to find

- ▶ Little about the children in the Oblates' records, except where important events take place (possibly more in documents from the Sisters)
- ▶ Hints, stories to cross-reference
- ▶ Lists of visitors
- ▶ Mentions of visits to doctors
- ▶ Attempts to deal with problems (runaways, certain cases of abuse, transfers)
- ▶ How the school functioned (not the policies, not the experiences of survivors)
- ▶ Lots of bureaucratic information - this was a bureaucracy

What to be careful of with translations

- ▶ Translation is not regulated: translators can charge whatever they want
- ▶ Prices are generally between \$0,15 and \$0,19 per word
- ▶ Anyone can say they are a translator - but it is not necessary to have professional translators to work on these documents
- ▶ This is not technical translation, so translators should not be charging high prices
- ▶ Handwritten documents do take longer to translate
- ▶ The language is older French, but easy to understand for those who grew up with it in rural areas
- ▶ Some words have to be looked at in context (eg. battre = threshing... but also to beat)

A few principles

- ▶ The data belongs to First Nations
 - ▶ Have a confidentiality agreement that includes data management
 - ▶ Be careful of your relationship with the institution that gave you the documents
 - ▶ Keep track of the documents and keep the originals
 - ▶ Ensure nothing is published
- ▶ The goals are those of the community
 - ▶ Have someone sit with you to identify what documents ought to be translated first
 - ▶ Explain these goals clearly to the translators
 - ▶ Discuss what responsibility and obligations mean to you
- ▶ Less of a contract, more of a collaboration: **mâmahohkamâtowin**
 - ▶ This is a different model from their usual work
 - ▶ Have a contact person for questions

A few principles

- ▶ Translators ought to meet the person who oversees the project
 - ▶ They usually work away from clients, with little contact - this can be different
 - ▶ Meeting makes the work more real, less abstract
 - ▶ A debrief might be helpful
- ▶ Translators can be asked to flag certain topics as they translate
- ▶ Translators ought to have some training to prepare them
 - ▶ Non-Indigenous people don't have a good sense of the history of the schools or of religion
 - ▶ This is work that can be difficult emotionally: what is described itself, and what it shatters in people's own view of themselves, their community, their country
 - ▶ 4 Seasons of Reconciliation
 - ▶ Training about the schools to learn the vocabulary
 - ▶ Access to TRC report & other documents

What is in the future

- ▶ Creating a translation group, based on a course taught by Dr Jérôme Melançon
- ▶ Basic training for translators regarding Residential Schools and the documents
- ▶ List of resources for translators
- ▶ A more formal document once we have done more work and know better how to do things (all thanks to Barb Lavalée and her team!)
- ▶ Develop capacity to identify the documents to translate
- ▶ Resources for First Nations communities about the context of the schools
- ▶ The story of another Melançon that illustrates the connection of French-speaking / Francophone communities with the religious orders and the schools

Happy to talk with you

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