The influence of Christianity on the Bunun language
— A preliminary overview

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Introduction

• Bunun, Austronesian, Taiwan

• Christianity
  – Central to modern Bunun society
  – Often largely ignored in linguistic research
Introduction

• Influence of Christian religion and religious organisations on:
  – Indigenous rights, incl. language rights
  – The Bunun linguistic system
  – Bunun dialect differentiation / homogenisation

• General overview
The Bunun language

- Verb-initial
- Philippine-type voice system
- Elaborate verbal morphology
- 50,000 ethnic members, ± 20,000 speakers
- Five dialects
The Bunun language

*Proto-Bunun\n\nNorthern Bunun
  - Takituduh
  - Takibaka

Central Bunun
  - Takbanuaz
  - Takivatan

Southern Bunun — Isbukun
Traditional culture

- Semi-sedentary family groups
- Non-stratified society
  - Competence / experience determines leadership
- Hunters and headhunters
- Animism
  - Complex system of social taboos (*samu*)
  - Various types of shamans
Modern transformations

• Japanese Occupation (1895-1945)
  – Concentration of Bunun into (relatively) low-lying villages
  – Introduction modern infrastructure

• Christian missionaries (first half 20th cy)
  – Replacement / adaptation traditional belief systems
  – Healthcare and food relief
Christianity and Bunun

• Two main organizations:
  – Catholic Church
  – Presbyterian Church

• Most Bunun would identify as Christian

• Tightly integrated in most people’s daily life
Christianity and Bunun

• Influence on the Bunun language:
  – Language preservation
    • Indigenization
    • Language documentation
    • Indigenous rights
  – Linguistic impact
    • Bible translations
    • Liturgical practices
Indigenization

• All churches in aboriginal communities are fully indigenized
  – Bible translation in local language
  – Liturgy and other church activities in local language
  – Local church officials
Language documentation


Indigenous rights

• Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines
  – Founded 29 December 1984
  – Indigenous students National Taiwan University
  – Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary (玉山神學院)
The Bunun Bible(s)

- **1951**: *Gospel of Matthew* in zhuyin fuhao
- **1955**: Gospel of Luke in zhuyin fuhao
- **1962**: Gospel of Matthew in zhuyin fuhao
- **1983**: New Testament in Roman script
- **1987**: Short Old Testament in Roman script
- **2000**: New Testament + Short Old Testament in Roman script
“… the reliance on indigenous categories to translate Christian concepts during the proselytizing process has significant bearings on how Christianity is adopted.”

Yang (2008:70)
Influence on the lexicon

• Borrowing:
  – Biblical names
  – From Mandarin, English, Japanese or Latin
  – Integrated in native phonology
    • Exceptions: /e/ and word-initial /j/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandarin</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matai</td>
<td>马太 mǎ tài</td>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Matthæus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maluku</td>
<td>马可 mǎ kě</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Marcus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luka</td>
<td>路加 lù jiā</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Lucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iuhani</td>
<td>约翰 yué hàn</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Joannes (Iohanni)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luma</td>
<td>罗马 luó mǎ</td>
<td>Romans</td>
<td>ad Romanos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalatia</td>
<td>加拉太 jiā lā tài</td>
<td>Galatians</td>
<td>ad Galatas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipisu</td>
<td>以佛所 yǐ fó suǒ</td>
<td>Ephesians</td>
<td>ad Ephesios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebulai</td>
<td>希伯來 xī bó lái</td>
<td>Hebrews</td>
<td>ad Hebræos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iakubu</td>
<td>雅各 yǎ gè</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>Jacobi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence on the lexicon

• Conceptual transfer
  – semantic extension of existing religious concepts to a Christian context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible</th>
<th>Takivatan</th>
<th>Christian meaning</th>
<th>Traditional meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dihanin</td>
<td>diqanin</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hanitu</td>
<td>qanitu</td>
<td>devil, demon</td>
<td>ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sasbinað</td>
<td>sasbinʔað</td>
<td>Lord (God / Jesus)</td>
<td>person of authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence on the lexicon

- Meaning specialisation
  - General meaning > religious domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Takivatan</th>
<th>Generic meanings</th>
<th>Religious meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isʔaŋ</td>
<td>*breath &gt; feeling &gt; belief</td>
<td>&gt; Christian faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liskaʔuni</td>
<td>worship</td>
<td>&gt; Christian worship, belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaʔuni</td>
<td>create, make, construct</td>
<td>&gt; creation, Genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tamasað</td>
<td>strength</td>
<td>&gt; spirit of God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence on the lexicon

- Derivation and compounding

  *is-ka-kaupan*
  
  TRANSFER-CV-all
  
  ‘universe, creation’

  *tama  dihanin*
  
  father heaven
  
  ‘God’
Beyond the lexicon

• Morphology and grammar?
• Narrative and performative genres?

• More research is needed
Standardization

• Bible translation based on the Isbukun dialect
Standardization

• Result:
  – Asymmetrical relation between Isbukun and other Bunun dialects
  – Standardization?
  – … or encroachment?
Standardization

• Bible

(1) Masa kitŋab Sasbinað Dihanin kauni mas dalah dihanin.
 WHEN begin lord heaven MAKE-be OBL earth heaven

1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

(2) Iskakaupa hai madumdum niaŋ minʔaiða.
 world TPC STAT-oblscured NEG-PROG INCH-exist

1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
First, I want to thank God for his help and impartial love, and that it is possible that this evening someone has come here, from a place that is called Bilisi (Belgium), a relative, who since he has come here is called Pian.
Bunun church services

• Language clash: In non-Isbukun communities:
  – Bible + hymns: Isbukun
  – Sermon and other parts: native dialect
  – (Certain hymns and part of the sermon: Mandarin)
Bunun church services

• Isbukun negatively affects linguistic performance:
  – Reading speed
  – Word-by-word reading
  – Hesitation phenomena
  – Understanding (?)
Bunun church services

- Sinapalan village, 24 July 2011
- Takbanuađ dialect

Sermon (native dialect)  
Reading NT (Isbukun Bible)
Religious songs

• Adaptation of hymns to traditional Bunun eight-voiced polyphony

Modern

Traditional
Conclusion

• Christianity affects the development of the Bunun language in various ways
  – Language preservation and documentation
  – Language rights
  – Introduction of new concepts & linguistic change
  – Standardization / dialect leveling
• Its influence is largely positive
Bibliography


Uninana miqumisanan!