

The influence of Christianity on the Bunun language: A preliminary overview¹

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This paper discusses two major ways in which Christianity exerted an important influence on the Bunun language. In the second half of the twentieth century, Western Churches were instrumental in the protection of indigenous languages, including Bunun, against the aggressive and destructive policies of cultural and linguistic unification of the Taiwanese government. In a completely different way, the introduction of a Bible translation and various liturgical materials in Bunun led, especially in the Presbyterian Church, to the creation of an artificial variant of the language that is a consensus between the dominant Isbukun dialect and other dialects, and over time has come to resemble a sort of supra-dialectal standard. This in turn resulted in the creation of a pan-dialectal religious vocabulary and an increased influence of Isbukun, the largest of Bunun dialects, on other dialects. Today, a complex relationship exists between this influential religious standard and more localised dialects of Bunun.

1. Introduction

The Bunun people are an Austronesian people indigenous to Taiwan and their forefathers have lived on Taiwan for at least 5000 years. Their language, which consists of five main dialects, is typically studied in terms of its historical development relative to other Austronesian languages on the island, possibly taking into account contact with the Sinitic languages on the island. However, during the past century another social force has been a major influence on the Bunun language and most other Austronesian languages in Taiwan: the introduction of various forms of Christianity by Western missionaries.

In the light of the obvious importance of Christian religion in the lives of many present-day aboriginal people, it is surprising that the relationship between language and religion has received little attention in academic circles (an exception is Yang 2008), and virtually none in the field of linguistics. It is almost as if we linguists do not want to recognize the enormous

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Abbreviations: Isb = Isbukun, Tbz = Takbanuaz, Tvn = Takivatan, Tba = Takibakha, Tdh = Takituduh

Glosses: II = 1st person inclusive / IS = 1st person singular / ANAPH = anaphoric / ATTR = attributive marker / COMPL = complementiser / DISTR = distributive / DYN = dynamic / EMO = emotive / INCH = inchoative / IRR = irrealis / LDIS = left-dislocation (topicaliser) / LNK = linker / N = neutral case / NEG = negative / OBL = oblique case / POSS = possessive / PROG = progressive / STAT = stative / TPC = topicaliser / WHEN = temporal simultaneity

importance of an imported Western religion on what is essentially a fragile indigenous language; in the field of language description and documentation, there still is a reflex to focus on ‘pure’ or ‘original’ linguistic knowledge, unadulterated by external cultural influences that are believed to inevitably lead indigenous cultures and their languages to their impending doom.

In this paper, I will use the Bunun language as an example to argue that, at least in Taiwan, the influence of Christianity on indigenous languages has not been unambiguously deleterious. On the contrary, it could be argued that Christian organisations, and the creation of a modern religious linguistic idiom, have been major contributing factors to the continued survival of some of the Austronesian languages of Taiwan, Bunun being one of them.

Since their arrival in Taiwan at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, two major strands of Christianity, Catholicism and Presbyterianism, have influenced the Bunun language in two major ways. Section 2 first describes how in the beginning of the 20th century, Bunun traditional society was radically transformed by the Japanese occupation and the introduction of Christianity. Section 3 gives an overview of how Christian organisations played an active role in the promotion and preservation of the indigenous languages of Taiwan, and especially on Bunun. Section 4 discusses the influence of Bible translations and liturgical texts and practices on the lexicon and grammar of Bunun.

Before we can turn to these matters, this section will first give a short overview of the Bunun language.

1.1. *The Bunun language*

Bunun (ISO: *bnn*) is one of the Austronesian language spoken on Taiwan. It is highly agglutinative: in the Takivatan dialect, I have so far recorded over 200 distinct affixes, the majority of which verbal prefixes (De Busser 2009). Nouns and verbs are the two major open word classes; adjectival concepts are encoded by various subclasses of stative verbs. Word classes in Bunun are rather fluid, in the sense that many roots can function as both nouns and verbs. All Bunun dialects have a verb-initial word order and a complex system of verbal agreement that is sometimes referred to as a Philippine-style voice system or a focus system (Himmelman 2002).

Already during the Japanese Occupation, a distinction was made between three Bunun subgroups and five distinct dialects (see e.g. Ogawa & Asai 1935:585ff). This distinction corresponds to five major Bunun clans and to a clear pattern of linguistic differentiation.

Table 1 – Bunun dialects

Dialect group	Dialect	Counties
Southern Bunun	Isbukun	Nantou, Taitung, Kaohsiung
Central Bunun	Takbanuaz	Nantou, Hualien, Taitung
	Takivatan	Nantou, Hualien
Northern Bunun	Takibakha	Nantou
	Takituduh	Nantou

Today, the Bunun language is one of the most widely dispersed aboriginal languages in Taiwan. Bunun origin stories and historical and linguistic evidence suggest that this dispersal started from somewhere in Nantou County, very likely under the influence of internal

population pressures, and that the Isbukun dialect (and the now-extinct Takipulan dialect) diverged from other dialects significantly earlier than other dialects, probably around the beginning of the 18th century (see Li 2001, Palalavi 2006).

Dialect differentiation, be it on the level of grammar, phonology, or the lexicon, is considerable, especially between Isbukun and the other dialects. To a certain degree, this makes the dialects mutually incomprehensible to a certain degree, although this communication breakdown is far from complete (older Bunun speakers can with some effort communicate with speakers of other dialects) and, as I will discuss below, is counteracted by sociocultural factors.

Few systematic comparisons have been conducted between Bunun dialects, with the exception of Li (1988). He proposes an internal reconstruction of Bunun based on interdialectal phonological and lexical variations. Below are some common phonological differences between Isbukun and the other dialects (examples are from Li 1988 or my personal data):

1. Isbukun sometimes has /tʃ/ where other dialects have retained /t/, e.g. Isb /tʃinpaχ/ vs. Tbz/Tvn /Tba/Tdh /timpaq/ ‘wave’
2. Where Central and Northern dialects have uvular /q/, Isbukun often has /χ/, as in Isb /χasila/ vs. Tbz/Tvn /Tba/Tdh /qasila/ ‘salt’
3. Intervocalic glottal stops are considerably less common in Isbukun than in other dialects, e.g. Isb /su/ vs. Tbz/Tvn /suʔu/ or /su/ ‘2S.PAT’
4. Isbukun has a phoneme /dʒ/ which is largely absent in other dialects. Instead, Central dialects tend to have /t/ and Takibakha the affricate /ts/, e.g. Isb /dʒina/ vs. Tbz/Tvn /tina/ vs. Tbz /tsina/ ‘mother’

These phonological differences will be relevant in section 4. My personal data draws mainly on the research I did on the Takivatan dialect of Bunun as it is spoken in Bahuan, in the County Hualien at the east coast of Taiwan, and Takbanuaz as spoken in Sinapalan, a village deep in the Central Mountain Range in the County Nantou.

2. The transformation of traditional Bunun society

2.1. Traditional Bunun society

The Bunun people traditionally lived in semi-permanent villages in the deep interior of Taiwan’s Central Mountain Range. At the core of society was the family group (*tastulumaq*) and most settlements consisted of one or a small number of extended families. Social organization was relatively loosely organized. When overpopulation, depleted hunting grounds, or conflict started to create social friction, family groups would split off from the main village and establish new settlements elsewhere. As a result, the geographical spread of the Bunun tribe eventually stretched across the interior of Taiwan, from the County Kaohsiung in the South to Nantou in the north.

Despite distance in space, family relationships were (and still are) considered extremely important in Bunun society, as can be seen from the centrality of the concept of *taisʔan* ‘relative’, literally referring to a group of people from the same paternal lineage, but often interpreted more abstractly and also including close friends and anybody accepted in the family group. Clan structure was crucial in determining a potential marriage partner, as there

is a strong prohibition on marrying anybody related until the third degree in the maternal or paternal line in order to prevent inbreeding.

Agriculture centred on various types of millet (rather than rice), sweet potato and yam. Utilized land was inherited in the male line, but arable land was redivided yearly based on actual use and the needs of individual families. If land was left uncultivated because individuals owned more than could be tilled, the excess could be ceded to other members of the community. Hunting took (and still takes) a crucial place in traditional Bunun society, both as a source of animal protein and as a cultural activity. Participation in the hunt was restricted to the male members of the population and was a strict taboo for women. Success in the hunt was an important factor of the social prestige and would be indicated in the ceremonial head dress of each hunter.

Before the Japanese Occupation (1895-1945), intertribal warfare was common. This often involved headhunting, in many Austronesian tribes in Taiwan part of a coming-of-age ritual for male members of the tribe. This habit died out during with the coming of Christianity at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.

Bunun tribes or clans did not have strong centralized leadership or strong social stratification. Important decisions were always made by consensus, after meetings between the elders in the community. For war and hunting expeditions, leaders were chosen by common consent based on their experience and status in the community. The social status of adult males dependent on their success as hunters and warriors, as expressed by the number of human skulls and animal skulls or bones acquired in previous expeditions (see Huang 1995). Leaders could be replaced at any time when their performance did not meet the expectations of the community.

Traditional Bunun religion was animist and centred sky and moon worship and a belief that the lives of men were influenced by invisible spirits (*qanitu*). A strict system of rituals and social taboos (*samu*) governed every aspect of life including the selection of marriage partners, times for the hunt and agricultural activities, restrictions on certain foodstuff during certain periods of the year, and so on. Many acts related to agriculture, the hunt or social activities needed to be preceded by fixed rituals. Transgression of taboos or non-adherence to rituals was believed to bring adversity and even death on the family or group, and could be severely punished. Central to the Bunun religious experience was the concept of *matibahi*, the interpretation of prophetic dreams by male elders before significant decisions related to one's life, work on the land, the hunt, etc.

Before the coming of Christianity and modern medicine, various distinct types of shamans or sorcerers, usually women, formed a bridge with the supernatural world and worked as healers. In pre-Christian times, healers changed the first name of a person in case of life-threatening illness in order to deflect the evil influence of the disease.

2.2. Modern Bunun society

The beginning of the twentieth century brought great changes to traditional Bunun society, as it did to all Taiwanese ethnic groups. A first major change happened when in 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Taiwanese citizens became de facto second-class citizens of the Japanese Empire and were treated harshly by the colonial government.

A priority of the Japanese administration was to gain full military and administrative control over the entire island. This included the mountainous interior, which was economically interesting because of its potential for timber harvesting, in particular the exploitation of camphor wood. For centuries, there had been tensions between the tribes living in the interior,

which included the Bunun, and Chinese settlers looking for land and opportunities in the mountains. Now as well, unwanted intrusions in aboriginal territory were met with violence. The Japanese administration reacted by sending military expeditions (Anon 1911). They installed an increasing number of police outposts and an electrified fence, but also tried to entice the aboriginal population by offering trading opportunities, medical care, and education (Wang 1980:46–47). By 1920, the situation had sufficiently stabilised for the colonial administration to institute a reservation system.

In order to make it easier to administrate their unruly subjects, the colonial administration forced high-mountain aborigines to resettle into large lower-lying villages. According to Wang (1980:48), more than 35,000 aborigines were reported to have relocated between 1920 and 1935. The Bunun formed a disproportionately large group: by 1929, 62 percent of the entire Bunun population had been relocated from small family groups high up in the mountains to villages under Japanese control. This change in social geography caused a far-reaching change in structure of Bunun society. Daily contact with the Japanese colonial administrators made it necessary to instate a *tumuq* or village leader, a fixed person of authority that served as a conduit to Japanese officials. From that moment onward, Bunun social organisation would have a double hierarchy. On an official political level, each Bunun village was represented by an appointed – and later elected – leader. On an informal and cultural level, important decisions continued to be taken collectively, after deliberation of a council of elders.

Despite the harsh and oppressive treatment by Japanese colonial administrators, the Japanese Occupation brought most aboriginal communities great advantages. Modern wet rice culture was introduced and Bunun were able to move away from a subsistence-based system where millet and yam were the main food sources. The Japanese replaced a tradition of tribal warfare with a modern legal system, ending the practice of headhunting. They started developing a modern road network, introduced modern medicine and sanitation, and schooling for all children up to the age of twelve. All in all, living conditions greatly improved during the Japanese occupation.

The twentieth century brought another change, that would transform Bunun society as radically (if not more so) than political factors. As mentioned above, traditional Bunun religion was animist and based on a strict system of social commandments and prohibitions. From the mid nineteenth century onwards, waves of European and Canadian missionaries of various denominations came to Taiwan. These groups mainly set up base in or near the larger cities at the North or West Coast of Taiwan, but once they had established a solid foothold, towards the middle of the century, missionaries were sent to locations around the island, including the aboriginal villages.

Initially, the success of these groups in Bunun communities was limited, as Christianity was seen as ‘the religion of the Amelika (Americans), which did not concern the Bunun’ (Yang 2008:55). When missionaries started offering healthcare and food relief as incentives, the number of converts gradually grew. At present a large majority of Bunun identifies as belonging to either the Bunun Presbyterian Church or to the Catholic Church, their exact distribution changes from tribe to tribe and village to village. Bahuan (馬遠村), a Bunun village in Hualien, has both a Catholic and a Presbyterian church for slightly over 3700 inhabitants, half of which belong to the former and half of which to the latter denomination. Sinapalan (信箱村) in Nantou only has a Presbyterian church and a majority of inhabitants are attending it.

Both Churches are fully indigenized. The Bible and hymn books have been translated in Bunun, religious services are entirely or partly in Bunun, and clergy are normally expected to

be fluent in the language. This is a hard requirement for Presbyterian pastors graduating from the Yu-shan Theological Seminary near Hualien, and almost all are actual members of the Bunun tribe. At present, most Bunun consider this imported religion to be an important part of their lives and they feel there is a “close connection between Christianity and aboriginal identity” (Yang 2008:52). It is curious then that no one has seriously investigated its influence on the Bunun language.

3. Christianity and the preservation of indigenous languages

It goes beyond doubt that Christianity largely replaced traditional religion. However, despite its foreign origin and contrary to the widely held conception of Christianity as a force destructive to indigenous culture, Christianity in Taiwan has in general exerted an altogether more positive influence. Missionaries of both denominations were careful to incorporate elements of traditional culture in their local religious practices, conduct church services in local indigenous languages, and go through considerable effort to provide a local translation of the Bible and other key liturgical materials, such as hymns, in the local language. In contrast with and opposition to the Kuomintang government, churches in Taiwan have always been staunch protectors of aboriginal rights and languages. It is this surprising and sometimes contradictory relationship between Christianity and aboriginal languages that will be the topic of the remainder of this article.

3.1. *The Dutch*

The relationship between Christianity and Taiwan’s indigenous population goes back several centuries, although initially Christian influence was geographically limited to the West Coast of Taiwan. The first substantial records we have of any Austronesian languages of Taiwan were written by Dutch missionaries in the 17th century. In 1624, the Dutch established a permanent base near present-day Tainan, in the south-west of the island. Their main interest was not Taiwan itself but possible trade routes to China and Japan. Soon, however, two groups of people found ways to meaningfully interact with the diverse groups of indigenous people populating the Western Plains: fur traders and missionaries.

Missionaries mainly interacted with two groups: the Siraya and the Favorlang. Already in 1627, George Candidius established himself in the Siraya village of Sinkan in order to convert the villagers to Christianity, preaching in the local language. He wrote a book about his experience, which effectively contained the first detailed account of a Taiwanese aboriginal group (published in English as Candidius 1732). His successor would eventually establish a school in the village, and other missionaries followed a similar pattern in other Siraya and Favorlang villages. Education in the local language required the development of a script and language materials, and this led in the period up to 1650 to the publication of various religious works in indigenous languages (e.g. for Siraya: Gravius 1661, Gravius 1662; Favorlang: Jacob Vertrecht’s *Articles of Christian Instruction*, published in Campbell 1896) and word lists (Favorlang: Happart 1842; Siraya: a word list by Candidius, now lost).

All these works were written in Roman script, and this was subsequently also used for drawing up legal documents in Siraya. This habit continued after the Dutch were ousted by Koxinga in 1662. Taiwan became part of the Qing Empire, but legal documents in Roman script would be used locally for another half century at least. However, the use of this writing system does not appear to have spread to other languages, such as the ancestral Bunun language.

3.2. *Modern missionaries in Taiwan*

Western missionaries would not be welcome on Taiwan for the two centuries. The situation only changed in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Dong (2008:368), the Catholic priests Fernando Sainz and Angel Bofurul were the first who in 1859 were allowed to establish a mission in what is now Kaohsiung. The Presbyterian Church soon followed: James L. Maxwell came to Tainan in 1865 and George L. Mackay to Tamsui in the North in 1872. These missionaries initially established themselves in urban centres, but as their numbers grew, they started to expand their activities into the less accessible parts of the island, and around the 1930s many Bunun villages saw the arrival of Catholic priests and Presbyterian vicars. We saw in section 2.2 that their initial success was limited, but over time they managed to convert the vast majority of the population.

3.3. *Missionaries and indigenous languages*

The missionaries that came to Taiwan in the 19th and 20th century, irrespective of their denomination, made a conscious choice to proselytize and preach in the local language of the community, and it is clear that their intention was to evolve towards fully indigenized churches.

From the onset, missionaries attempted to proselytise in the local people's mother tongues, and this meant that they needed to learn the language. In the County Hualien, at the east coast of Taiwan, two French Catholic missionaries compiled extensive lexicons of the Bunun language: the *Dictionnaire Français-Bunun* (Flahutez 1970) and the *Lexique de la Langue Bunun en Usage a Ma-Hoan* (Duris 1987). Unfortunately, none of these works were formally published and therefore, like many missionary texts, are not widely available to local communities or the general public. It is difficult to say how many more similar texts are lost in obscurity. Missionaries are not the only producers of such language materials (Japanese anthropologists and linguists did their fair share of the work as well, e.g. Ogawa & Asai 1935, Nihira 1988). However, they are in a unique position in that they live and work in the communities they write about, often for many decades, and therefore acquire an intimate knowledge of the local language.

Once established, foreign and Chinese missionaries encouraged indigenous members of their churches to be educated as clerics. In 1946, the Presbyterian Church founded the Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary with the explicit purpose of training indigenous ministers for local churches. Students are normally expected to be able to be fluent in the language of their future congregations.

Crucial to the indigenization of local churches was the translation of the Holy Scripture. Especially in earlier days, this work appears to have been mainly conducted by Western missionaries in Taiwan. Later, the involvement of local indigenous clergy and church communities grew considerably. The Bible Society in Taiwan mentions the following (partial and complete) translations of the Bible in local languages on its website:

Table 2 – Bible translations in Formosan languages

Language	OT	NT	Published
Amis	partial	complete	1997
Paiwan	partial	complete	1993
Bunun	partial	complete	2000
Atayal	partial	complete	2003
Truku	complete	complete	2005
Yami	–	complete	1994
Rukai	–	complete	2001
Tsou	–	complete	2011

The religious communities that use these Bibles are aware of their importance for the preservation of their languages. In a magazine article on the importance of the Amis Bible translation, a Presbyterian minister and member of the Amis tribe writes that “Bible translation helps to preserve Aboriginal languages. [...] After the Bible was published in Amis it became a storehouse for the language” (originally in Mandarin, translated as Olam 2003).

The latest Bunun Bible translation, containing the entire New Testament and a short version of the Old Testament, was published in 2000 by the Bunun Presbyterian Church and the Bible Society in Taiwan (Bunun Bible 2000). It is the culmination of veritable tradition of partial translations, going to 1951 when the Presbyterian ministers Hu Wen-chi (胡文池) and Zhang Yu-fa (張玉發) published for the first time a Bunun translation of the Gospel of Matthew, using not the Roman alphabet but Zhuyin Fuhao (注音符號), a phonetic transcription system developed for Mandarin. In 1983, the Bible Society published a complete New Testament in the Roman script. For the next edition, the Bunun Bible translation project fully professionalised, and involved a substantial team of translators, many of them Bunun ministers. This eventually resulted in the 2000 translation, the influence of which on the Bunun language will be discussed more elaborately in section 4.

3.4. Indigenous rights movement

The influence of Christian organisations on indigenous languages was not restricted to the publication of materials in these languages. Especially the Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary (玉山神學院) in Hualien County, which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, played a pivotal role in the indigenous rights movement in Taiwan. On 29 December 1984, members of this seminary, together with indigenous students at National Taiwan University in Taipei, founded the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (Hsieh 1994) to campaign for official recognition for Taiwan’s indigenous population. Their key demands were the abolition of the aboriginal reservation system (in which aboriginal groups effectively rent their land from the government), a restoration of proper aboriginal land rights, and the establishment of a government agency to allow aborigines greater political autonomy (see Stainton 1999).

Another demand, which was eventually implemented, was the replacement of the official Chinese term for Taiwanese aborigines, 山胞 (shān bāo ‘mountain compatriots’), which was considered politically charged and racist, by 原住民族 (yuán zhù mín zú), literally ‘original inhabitants’, but often translated as ‘indigenous people’.

They were not directly focused on the protection of aboriginal languages, but their actions eventually led to the official recognition of several aboriginal tribes in Taiwan (14 at the moment of writing) and the establishment in 1996 of the Council of Aboriginal Affairs, renamed to Council for Indigenous Peoples in 2002. This government body is amongst other things responsible for the implementation of mother tongue education projects in aboriginal communities and is involved in the publication of various works relevant to indigenous languages and cultures.

4. Bunun as a language of the Bible

4.1. *The Bible and Bunun dialects*

In translating any written work, choices have to be made about the exact language, vocabulary, and style to be used. For the present Bible translation in Bunun (I will refer to it below as the Bunun Bible), a decision was made to mainly use the Isbukun dialect, most likely because it is the largest and most studied dialect. This is already clear from the title of the book, *Tama Dihanin tu Halinga* (in the Takivatan and Takbanuaz dialect the /h/ would be replaced by /q/). Such a decision creates problems because, as we hinted at in 1.1, there are considerable differences between the five Bunun dialects. However, it is also unavoidable: for practical reasons it is not possible to create Bible translations for each variant of each language.

This had two important consequences. First, the present translation created a de facto super-dialectal and super-regional standard of Bunun. Given the importance of religion to the lives of a considerable proportion of Bunun (probably more so to the Presbyterians than the Catholics), and wide distribution of the present edition, the language of this Bible translation exerts an influence on members of the community outside the original geographical area of the dialect it was based on. The Bunun Bible has given Isbukun to some extent the status standard variety for religious practice and, because it is a central text to Christian religious practice, one would expect that it exerts a disproportionate influence on the language use of members of other dialect groups.

A second consequence is that to members of Takbanuaz, Takivatan, Takibakha and Takituduh communities, the language of their Bible is not closely related to the common vernacular. This is not necessarily negative: the English King James Bible was relatively remote from the English vernacular, but nevertheless had a major influence on the English language. It should also be acknowledged that, as a literary work, any Bible translation is by its nature different from spoken vernacular. However, the dialectal slant of the Bunun Bible does mean that the translation is less accessible to non-Isbukun Bunun. This affects people's interaction with religious materials, as will be illustrated in section 4.3. There is some awareness of this fact, and a limited countermovement exists that tries to work towards more localised translations (Istasipal 2002).

The following two short fragments can serve as illustrations of the difference between the language of the Bunun Bible and that of the Takivatan dialect of Bunun. The excerpts will serve as a basis for the remaining discussion this section and the next. A first segment consists of the first three sentences of the Bunun translation of the Biblical creation story (Gen. 1:1-2).

- (1) *Masa kitɲab Sasbinað Dihanin kauni mas dalah dihanin.*
masa kitɲab Sasbinað Dihanin ka-ɲuni 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 minɲaiða.*
iskakaupa hai ma-dumdum ni-aŋ min-ɲaiða
 world TPC STAT-obscured NEG-PROG INCH-exist
 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
- (3) *Itu Sasbinað Dihanin tamasað hai makadadaða sia danum.*
itu Sasbinað Dihanin tamasað hai maka-CV-daða sia danum
 this.here lord heaven strength TPC ???-DISTR-above ANAPH water
 And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

As a contrast, the first two sentences of the introduction to a story told in the Takivatan dialect as spoken in Bahuan, in the County Hualien county. (Note again that Takivatan and Takbanuaz are both central dialects and are therefore closely related.)

- (4) *Taŋusaŋ matumaskain, siatu, sasaipuk kamisama madaidað mapisðaŋ, maqtu haip tu sanavan minsumaɲa sia tu, takahan tupaun tu Bilisi tu taisɲan, a, tupaun, a, tunaɲiti tupaun tu Pian.*

taŋus-aŋ matumaskain sia tu sa-saipuk kamisama
 first-PROG be.grateful ANAPH ATTR CV-take.care.of God
ma-daidað ma-pisðaŋ maqtu haip tu sanavan min-suma-a
 STAT-love DYN-just be.possible today ATTR evening INCH-return-LNK
sia tu taka-han tupa-un tu Bilisi tu
 ANAPH ATTR ORIGINATE-go call-UF COMPL Belgium ATTR
taisɲan a tupa-un a tauna-ɲiti tupa-un tu Pian
 relative INTER call-UF INTER PERL-here say-UF COMPL P.

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.

- (5) *Ei aupa, a siatu naminsuma, naɲasa dau, taɲaða tu maquaqa mita pauntu bununa muɲa minhaiða miqumis .*

ei aupa a sia tu na-min-suma na-asa dau
 INTER thus INTER ANAPH ATTR IRR-INCH-return IRR-want EMO
taɲaða tu maquaqa-mita paun tu bunun a
 listen COMPL how.come-LNK 1I.N be.said COMPL people LNK
muɲa min-haiða m-iqumis
 almost INCH-exist DYN-life

And thus, he has come here, and of course he wants to know how we that are called Bunun first came into existence. (Source: TVN-012-002)

Section 1.1 has already given a short introduction to interdialectal phonological variation, and

some of these contrasts are relevant here. Where the Bible has /h/, the Central dialects often have /q/. *Dalah* ‘land’ and *dihanin* ‘heaven’ in the Bible (see ex. (1)) would in Takivatan be *dalaq* and *diqanin*. In certain lexemes, a Takivatan /h/ will become a glottal stop in the Biblical text; compare *minhaiða* ‘come into existence’ in ex. (5) with *minʔaiða* in (2).

It is somewhat surprising that such short stretches of text also illustrates a considerable number of rather fundamental grammatical differences. The oblique case marker *mas* in (1) appears in the Bible and the Isbukun dialect, but never in Takivatan. In fact, the Takivatan dialect has no case marking at all on noun phrases and only distinguishes grammatical role in pronominal forms.

In the Bible example (2), *hai* functions as a topicaliser that left-dislocates a pragmatically salient core argument; Takivatan instead uses the marker *-a*:

- (6) *aipun-a ma-sihal tu bunun*
 that.one-LDIS STAT-good ATTR people
 That one, he is a good man. (Tvn)

In the Takivatan dialect a bound morpheme *-a* can also function as a general linking element (see *maquaq-a* ‘how.come-LNK’ in (5)). This function has so far not been attested in the Biblical text, either because it does not appear or because it is significantly less common. Finally, the marker of temporal simultaneity *masa* ‘when’ in ex. (1) is relatively common in the Bible and the Isbukun dialect, but has never been attested in Takivatan.

On a stylistic level, the Takivatan text is riddled with interjections and pause markers, and contains longer, more convoluted sentences. In all likelihood, these features have more to do with the fact that this is a spoken rather than written text, and therefore are not indicative of any dialectal variation.

Note that the contrasts indicated here are based are just based on a very small text sample. A systematic study would bring a considerably higher number of phonological, lexical, and grammatical contrasts to light.

4.2. *The linguistic influence of Christianity*

The previous section mainly stresses differences between Biblical Bunun and the central Takivatan dialect. This section explores the ways in which Christianity, and the Bible as its authoritative religious text, has changes or is changing certain linguistic aspects of the spoken language of the Takivatan Bunun community.

With the introduction of Christianity, the necessity arose to create a set of concepts that were able to accurately represent certain core meanings of the new religious doctrine. Yang (2008:70) stresses that “the reliance on indigenous categories to translate Christian concepts during the proselytizing process has significant bearings on how Christianity is adopted.” It also shows how Christianity on the one hand introduced a radical breach with traditional animist beliefs, and on the other hand in appropriating certain traditional concepts created certain continuity.

4.2.1. *Borrowing*

The creation of new lexical meanings to accommodate for the new conceptual world of Christian theology followed a number of distinct strategies. Biblical names were usually borrowed from Mandarin, English, Japanese or Latin, and partially adapted to Bunun phonology. For illustrative purposes, the Bunun translation of some books of the New

Testament is given in Table 3; likely sources for each borrowing are underlined.

Table 3 – Names of NT books in Bunun and other languages

	Mandarin	English	Latin	Japanese²
Matai	<u>馬太</u> mǎ tài	Matthew	Matthæus	<u>Matai</u>
Maluku	<u>馬可</u> mǎ kě	<u>Mark</u>	Marcus	Mako
Luka	<u>路加</u> lù jiā	Luke	<u>Lucas</u>	Ruka
Iuhani	<u>約翰</u> yuē hàn	John	Joannes (<u>Iohanni</u>)	Yohane
Luma	<u>羅馬</u> luó mǎ	Romans	ad Romanos	Roma
Kalatia	<u>加拉太</u> jiā lā tài	<u>Galatians</u>	ad Galatas	Garatea
Ipisu	<u>以佛所</u> yǐ fó suǒ	Ephesians	ad Ephesios	<u>Epeso</u>
Hebulai	<u>希伯來</u> xī bó lái	<u>Hebrews</u>	ad Hebræos	<u>Heburu</u>
Iakubu	<u>雅各</u> yǎ gè	James	Jacobi	<u>Yakobu</u>

Interestingly, these loan words appear to have been borrowed not from a single source but from a variety of languages that the translators would have had access to. The choice of source language for each borrowing was most likely the ease of integration of the word into the Bunun phonological system. Most loans have been fully transposed into the Bunun phoneme inventory. In certain cases, this was deemed impossible for some reason and a new phoneme had to be introduced: /e/ in *Hebulai* [he:.bu:.lɔj] above is not a native Bunun phoneme and only shows up in Biblical names (other examples include *Iesu* ‘Jesus’ and *Ielimia* [je:.le:’mi:.ja] ‘Jeremiah’).

4.2.2. Conceptual transfer

In the case of concepts that are foreign to the traditional Bunun universe, but central to Christian theology, such as *God* or *heaven* or *devil*, three distinct strategies have been used. A first is best referred to as conceptual transfer or conceptual borrowing. It involves the semantic extension of existing Bunun lexemes to a Christian context. Often, source words represent concepts that are relevant to the traditional Bunun animism and that are then reinterpreted in terms of the conceptual framework of Christian theology. Examples of Biblical language and the Takivatan dialect are given in Table 4.

Table 4 – Conceptual transfer from traditional to Christian concepts

Bible	Takivatan	Christian meaning	Traditional meaning
<i>dihanin</i>	<i>diqanin</i>	Heaven	sky
<i>hanitu</i>	<i>qanitu</i>	devil, demon	ghost
<i>sasbinað</i>	<i>sasbinʔað</i>	Lord (God / Jesus)	person of authority

² Romanji forms are from ABS (1904).

In traditional Bunun culture, both the moon and the sky, as clearly delineated natural phenomenon that had a direct impact on the lives of men, had a divine status. This allowed Christian missionaries to extend the meaning of the word *dihanin* ‘sky’ to the Christian concept of ‘Heaven’, a location where the Christian God lives and where virtuous people go after death. Similarly, the traditional belief in *qanitu*, ghosts who would often negatively affect people’s lives, was extended to the Christian devil and to demons in general. The word *sasbinað* was traditionally used to refer to important people in a position of supreme political authority, and can easily be translated as ‘lord’. Christianity caused its meaning to be used as a reference to the Christian God or to Jesus Christ, as the holders of supreme spiritual authority.

In the cases above, words with a traditional religious connotation are transplanted to the newly introduced religious domain. This allowed missionaries to create a form of conceptual continuity between the old and the new faith, and this in all likelihood facilitated the acceptance of the new religion. It also created doctrinal interpretational problems, in that there was no way to be certain that new converts would indeed reinterpret traditional terminology, and not just assume that use of identical terminology did imply that Christianity was just a slightly improved version of old beliefs with cheap healthcare and social support added.

4.2.3. Meaning specialisation

For certain abstract concepts, existing Bunun lexemes with a fairly general meaning were simply transplanted to the new semantic domain of Christian faith. In these cases, it is not always equally clear whether the word has developed a new semantic aspect, or whether it continues to be used as before and is just applied in a new cultural context. The word *isʔaŋ* often refers to one’s breath, especially as the seat of feelings or beliefs, as in (7). In a Christian context, it specifically refers to one’s Christian faith and one’s spiritual adherence to Christian doctrine, as in (8).

(7) *ma-saqbit isʔaŋ*
 STAT-painful belief
 My heart is sad. (Lit: my breath is painful.) (Tvn)

(8) ... *na asa tama taqu uvavað tu kaupa i-nak isʔaŋ*
 well have.to father tell children COMPL complete POSS-1S.N belief
i-sia Tama Dihanin
 POSS-ANAPH father heaven
 ... father wants to tell his children about my belief in the Father in Heaven (Tvn)

Additional examples are given in Table 5.

Table 5 – Examples of meaning specialization

Takivatan	Generic meanings	Religious meaning
<i>isʔaŋ</i>	*breath > feeling > belief	> Christian faith
<i>liskaʔuni</i>	worship	> Christian worship, belief
<i>kaʔuni</i>	create, make, construct	> creation, Genesis
<i>tamasað</i>	strength	> spirit of God

4.2.4. Derivation and compounding

Finally, in some cases the need for new concepts simple triggered the creation of new words, either by derivation or by compounding. A nice example is the word *iskakaupa*, which refers to ‘creation’ or ‘the entire world’, a concept not at all relevant to the lives of hunters living in the deep mountains of Taiwan, but eminently central to Christian faith. It is created from the root *kaupa* ‘entire, all’ that is then CV-reduplicated to express plurality or a generic meaning, and prefixed by *is-* ‘belong to, come forth from’. Creation is thus referred to as ‘that which belongs to everything in existence’.

There is an evident expressive need to create words referring to the Christian God and to Jesus Christ. In this area, compounding is particularly productive. Note that the relationship between some of these terms is rather complex, especially across dialects. (In the table below, *kamisama* is a loan word from Japanese.)

Table 6 – Attestations of terms referring to God and Jesus

Bible/Isbukun	Takivatan	Translation	Refers to
<i>Tama Dihanin</i>	<i>Tama Diqanin</i>	‘Father in Heaven’	God
<i>Sasbinað Dihanin</i>	–	‘Lord in Heaven	God
?	<i>Tama Daðað</i>	‘Father above’	God
?	<i>Tama Sasbiŋʔað</i>	‘Father Lord above’	God
	<i>Dadaðað</i>		
?	<i>Tama Sasbiŋʔað Diqanin</i>	‘Father Lord in Heaven’	God
<i>Sasbinað</i>	–	‘Lord’	God
–	<i>Sasbinʔað</i>	‘Lord’	Jesus
<i>Kamisama</i>	<i>Kamisama</i>	‘God’	God

Note that many of the terms discussed above are adapted to the phonology of the local dialect, so they could be interpreted as inter-dialectal loan words.

Given the popularity of Christianity in Bunun communities, it is evident that these concepts take an important role in people’s daily lives and that their use is heavily influenced by the Bible, which is widely read in Bunun communities, and participation in religious practices. This is the case in village churches, but even more so for the Bunun (mostly under 50) who were drawn to Taipei or one of the other large cities in Taiwan in search for work. They are often dedicated Christians and often want to continue their active participation in the type of religious practices they enjoyed in their home village. To cater to their needs, the Bunun Presbyterian churches have been established in the large cities of Taiwan. Here, Bunun people from different dialect areas, but bound together by common tribal status, common beliefs, and often family ties, come together to experience their faith. Little research has been done on the effect that these mixed dialect communities have on Bunun language use.

It appears that in these younger generations of urbanized Bunun, the frequency of use of Japanese loanwords is considerably higher than among older people in village communities,

possibly because as recent loans they are more likely to be invariant across dialects. One could speculate that in such communities, in the absence of strong pressure from any local dialect, the influence of the Isbukun variant of the Bible is disproportionately large. More research is needed to investigate this hypothesis.

In this section, I have restricted myself largely to a discussion of lexical influences of Christianity on the Bunun language. It is possible, and even likely, that the coming of Christianity is exerting influence on the morphology and syntax of individual Bunun dialects. I would also suspect that it introduced new narrative and discursive genres to the language, or adapted existing genres to its religious needs. Again, more research will be needed to uncover these influences.

4.3. *Bunun church services: a language clash*

Church services in Bunun communities are either completely in the Bunun language or in a combination of Bunun and Mandarin, depending on the church community. The latter is often a preferred option when many of the church members are under 30 and are therefore at best semi-speakers of Bunun.

We saw in section 4.1 that the Isbukun dialect serves as a basis for the translation of the Bible, and also of certain hymn books. This means that in Bunun communities that do not speak the Isbukun dialect, the language of official Church literature is quite distant from the common vernacular of the community, and that this affects people's interaction with religious materials. In Presbyterian churches, this often leads to the somewhat strange situation that for certain parts of the church service (e.g. the sermon and the personal prayer) the community dialect is used, and for other parts (readings from the Scripture, certain hymns) the Isbukun dialect.

Disregarding songs for the moment, the use of Isbukun texts markedly influences linguistic performance. Scriptural texts in the Isbukun dialect are typically read considerably more slowly than other texts, there is often clear word segmentation (i.e. word-by-word reading), and a relatively high frequency of hesitation phenomena. These signs of disfluency are at least partly caused by the fact that the readers are confronted with an unfamiliar dialect that has an unfamiliar phoneme inventory and unfamiliar grammatical characteristics. It could also point towards a low general literacy in the Bunun language. Presently, education in Taiwan is completely in Mandarin and people over 75 received their primary education in Japanese. Most people would only have come into contact with Bunun written in Roman script when they started participating in church services or Bible reading groups.

5. Conclusion

It is strange that so little research has been conducted on the influence of Christianity on the Bunun language, as for the past century it has been a major influence on the lives of a vast majority of Bunun, either because they were or are active members of a Christian denomination, or because they are exposed to its value systems and cultural influences through interaction with believers in their family or in the general community.

From a language preservation perspective, this influence is a two-edged sword. Often, the influence of Christianity is interpreted in a negative light and is seen as an arrogant Western intruder and a destructive force on traditional culture. Examples abound: the gradual demise Celtic druidism after the coming of the early Irish missionaries, the destruction of the Mayan codices by Spanish priests, the aggressive tactics of certain evangelical groups in the Amazon. In Taiwan, and more specifically in Bunun communities, this has never really been the case.

It is true that Christianity has displaced the traditional animist belief systems of the Bunun and that this displacement was by design rather than by accident. However, Christian missionaries have often gone to great lengths to preach in local languages and to incorporate various aspects of traditional culture in their religious praxis. Christian organisations throughout the 20th century were also some of the staunchest defenders of Taiwanese indigenous cultures and languages, at a time when the Taiwanese had implemented an aggressive one-language policy. It is not a stretch to say that without the involvement of activists at Presbyterian Church (see section 3.4), languages like Bunun would be much worse off than they are now.

In the creation of a Bible translation in the dominant Isbukun dialect, the Western intruder has created a de facto supra-dialectal standard of the language, which to some extent serves as a unifying power that binds Bunun dialects together, and might therefore be more able to withstand language erosion than individual dialects in isolation would be. On the other hand, this situation might negatively influence language use of the other Bunun dialects in their communities. In any case, the use of Bunun as a language of fully indigenized Christian churches makes that Christianity in multiple ways exerts an effect on the linguistic structure and social status of the Bunun language. In this paper, I have attempted to give examples of some of these influences.

From a linguistic perspective, this is a fascinating process. The question is whether it is still relevant to the next generations of Bunun community members. Today, transmission of the Bunun language in Bunun communities has largely halted. Bunun people under 30 that are fluent in their language are rare. This is not surprising: under Taiwan's one-language policy, their parents were forced to speak Mandarin Chinese in school and in public, at the threat of psychological and corporeal punishment. Their children now go to schools where instruction is in Mandarin, apart from a couple of hours of mother tongue education a week. They listen to Mandarin pop music, and watch Mandarin television programs. In certain Bunun villages, churches have started to have their church services partly in Mandarin, in order to allow younger members of their flock to meaningfully participate.

Maybe, what the present paper has illustrated is an instance of the creation of a language started interrupted, a process that could have happened if the Bunun language would not have been swept away by a culturally dominant intruder, Mandarin Chinese.

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