VALUES AND SEMANTIC CHANGES IN YAGARIA, EASTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that under the impact of cultural, economic, social and political changes, languages in Papua New Guinea over the past decades have changed at a much faster pace than ever before, and maybe faster than languages elsewhere in the world. In Papua New Guinea languages have been 'eroded' through different influences and the integration of 'foreign' language elements has altered some languages to such an extent that their speakers fear, if not for the existence, then at least for the identity of their languages.

This paper describes and briefly evaluates changes in different semantic fields which have occurred over the past four decades in Yagaria, a non-Austronesian (or Papuan) language spoken by approximately 23,000 people in the Lufa district of the Eastern Highlands Province – see map.[1] Special attention will be given to the manner in which changes in the sphere of values have been accommodated by the language, and a comparison between this process and the developments in the fields of economics and physical culture will be made.

2. VALUES AND RELIGION

Language is invariably used to denote peoples' values. To speak of values in Papua New Guinea means to speak of religion, as religion for Papua New Guineans was always wholistic and permeated all spheres of life, the life of the individual as well as that of the community. Religion was an integral part of birth, marriage and death, of gardening, hunting and warfare, as well as of initiation, the male cult societies, morals and ethics, magic and counter-magic. Everything was intrinsically connected with religion, and nothing of life was without it.

In the field of religion there have been considerable changes in Papua New Guinea and this has resulted in very definite semantic changes in language. Much of the traditional religion has disappeared and with it some of the language expressing traditional values. Christianity as a new form of religion has been substituted, but what has happened to language in the process of this substitution?

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[1]This description is based on observations of the development of this language over a period of about thirty years and discussed in more detail in Renck (1990).
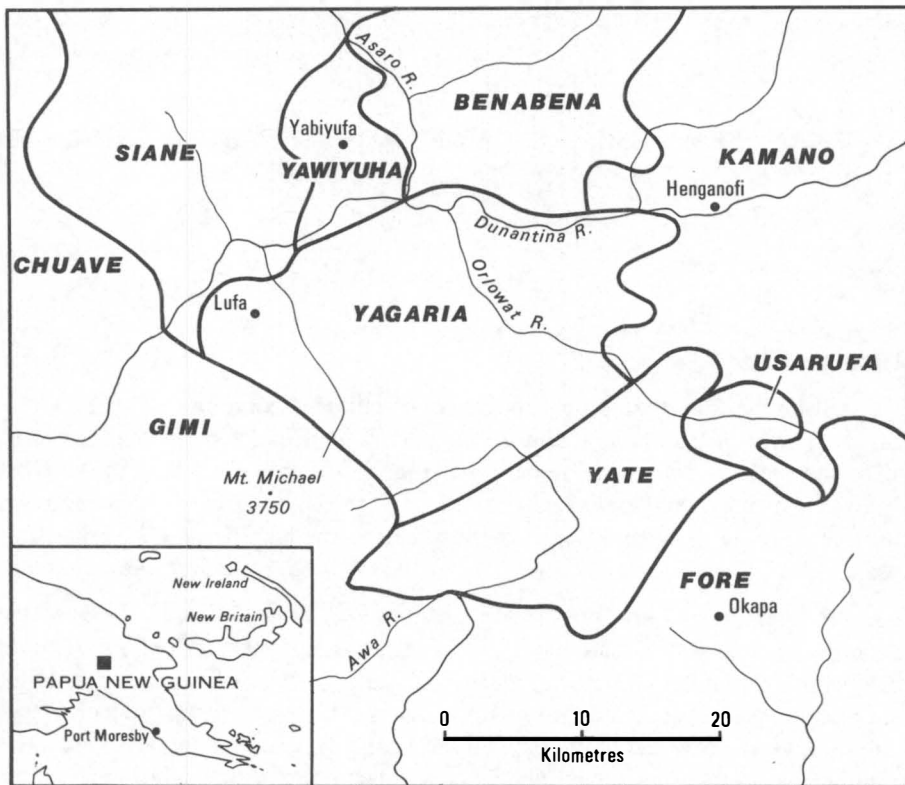
THE YAGARIA LANGUAGE AREA

The values of the new religion differed from those of the traditional one, though there were certain similarities or points of relation. But one thing was essentially the same: as with the old values language was needed for the new ones to be expressed and to be communicated.

It cannot be denied that missions have exerted negative influences as far as the languages of this country are concerned. There were instances where through mission work the vernaculars were devalued, and a person unable to speak a trade language (or in some cases a 'mission' language) was ridiculed and regarded as a kind of 'second class' Christian. There are, however, many examples of a different kind of development, and one of them is apparent in Yagaria.

3. CHANGES IN YAGARIA CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

In the Yagaria area Christian mission work was started in 1949 by Lutheran evangelists. Some of these came from mountainous areas of the Huon Peninsula, and some from the Kafe/Kamano area between Henganofi and Kainantu in the Highlands. Seventh Day Adventists arrived also at that time followed a little later by the New Tribes Mission and the Faith Mission.

At the time when the missions came, and the area opened up to the 'outside world', many culturally foreign items came in, and they helped gradually to change the lifestyle and working habits of the people. This sometimes occurred in connection with the work of the missions but often also quite independently of it.

Thus two kinds of innovations had to be accommodated linguistically, the one reflecting cultural innovations of a physical nature, the other those of an altered value system. In both fields there seem to have been two stages of development and change.

Cultural innovations were first of all linguistically adapted with expressions from Yagaria. The following examples illustrate this:

dekana	bone needle	was used to denote	nail
eimuta	place where someone sits	was used to denote	chair
emuta	digging stick	was used to denote	spade
eve	sugarcane	was used to denote	sugar
ganina	cane torch	was used to denote	lamp
ganuna	rain mat	was used to denote	umbrella
gaveda	vine	was used to denote	radio
gona	bamboo tube	was used to denote	bottle
gukae	apron	was used to denote	loincloth
haeya	leaf	was used to denote	banknote
hage	ash salt	was used to denote	salt
hagita	bamboo sliver	was used to denote	knife
luna	stone adze	was used to denote	hatchet
samo	clay pot	was used to denote	saucepan
yavana	stone	was used to denote	coin

But rather soon loan words from Tok Pisin were introduced to denote these cultural innovations. These loans were structurally adapted to Yagaria. The method of adaptation can best be demonstrated with nouns. There are two main noun classes in Yagaria, one comprising words ending in a glottal stop or the suffix -*na* (class 1), the other one ending in an open syllable (class 2). Every introduced noun was first of all phonologically and then also structurally adapted to fit into one of the two noun classes. The following list gives some examples of this.

Categorised as class 1 nouns were the following:

lediona/ledio'	radio
lipitina/lipiti'	tea
popona/popo'	pawpaw
pulumakana/pulumaka'	cattle
siana/sia'	chair
solena/sole'	salt
sukana/suka'	sugar
tomatona/tomato'	tomato
viduana/vidua'	window

Categorised as class 2 nouns were the following:

abalala	umbrella
botole	bottle
dili/nili	nail

goti	court
lamu	lamp
lavolavo	loincloth
savole	shovel, spade
sopu	soap
uvalisi	radio

For tools which eventually replaced a traditional counterpart entirely no loan was introduced. Instead the traditional term was simply applied to the new form of the tool, e.g. *luna/lu'* 'axe', and *hagita* 'knife'.[2]

In the field of values, and here we speak primarily of religious values, a slightly different development took place. There were also two stages, but these were in a different order from those noted for introduced material items discussed above. In the first some, but not many, loans were borrowed into Yagaria from other languages. However, only a few of these remained later. They thus seem to have been regarded only as stopgaps until a vernacular term had been found. The majority of these loans were eventually replaced by Yagaria expressions in the second stage of development.

In that stage Yagaria words and phrases that had been used from the start were never replaced by loans later on. The evangelists, who were rather poor speakers of Tok Pisin at that time, brought with them a religious terminology either in their mother tongue, the neighbouring Kafe/Kamano language, or in the Kâte language from the Finschhafen area, which at that time was used by the Lutherans as a school language and one of the three lingue franche in the evolving Lutheran Church in New Guinea. Over the years the evangelists, assisted by indigenous Yagaria speakers, tried to create a corresponding terminology in Yagaria. Actually, it would be more correct to say that it was those Yagaria speakers who had learned either Kâte or Kafe, who, guided and assisted by the evangelists, proceeded to coin Christian terms, using Yagaria words. Consequently in this value system only Yagaria terms were used, and loan words were hardly needed. The terms appeared in a great number of newly-created Christian hymns being sung.

The system remained the same even when more and more Yagaria people learned to speak Tok Pisin properly and eventually had command of a Christian terminology in Tok Pisin. The newly-coined Yagaria terms were never replaced by loans since the new values had apparently been adapted in the original wholistic way to the life of the people, and had truly become part of their thinking and value system.

To demonstrate how Christian terms developed in Yagaria, a few typical examples will be given.

Firstly, some of the few loans will be presented which came from or through Kâte, and have remained in use to date. The best known of these loans is the word for 'God', *Anutu,* which was introduced also in many other languages of Papua New Guinea. This name has often been regarded by other missions and churches as a peculiarity, or maybe even as an invention, of the Lutherans. However, it originated in the coastal Austronesian languages of Jabêm (Finschhafen)[3] and Bel (Madang), and through the medium of Kâte,[4] it spread to many areas of the interior. This widespread Austronesian word, with many cognates,

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[2]Similar linguistic developments have been described by Fischer (1962:28-30) for the Buang area.
[3]cf. Streicher 1982:13-14.
[4]cf. Flierl & Strauss 1977:5.

denotes 'spirit', 'ghost', 'deity' in many languages of the Pacific region, and is used widely by Christian Churches (most of them non-Lutheran) to denote 'God' (e.g. *Atua* in Maori and many other languages in Polynesia).[5]

Another loan from Kâte, *nunumu* 'prayer', apparently was introduced so early that many Yagaria speakers later on regarded it as a word from their own language and Lutheran Christians resisted all efforts to use a different word.

A third loan from Kâte which has been used is *malipu* 'cross', in the phrase *malipu yava* 'cross-tree' (as Tok Pisin *diwai kros*). The term appears to have been incorporated into Yagaria very early and it must have assumed a very special ('sacred') meaning right away, so that no local term seems to have been felt appropriate to replace it. This, by the way, parallels the adaptation of the Latin word *crux* 'cross' into the Germanic languages of Northern Europe in the early Middle Ages, denoting a (visible) religious symbol which had cultural significance at the same time.

Apart from the few loans most value terms, however, came from Yagaria itself, either through a change in meaning of existing words or phrases or by loan-translations (calques) being formed under the influence of the languages which the evangelists spoke. Some examples will be given here.

Existing terms which changed their meanings through constant use in the Christian sense include:

– *bonona/bono'*. This word originally denoted the instructions on customs, cult, etc., given to the young men before initiation. The word could be glossed as 'instruction' or 'directions for a good, correct way of life'. The expression changed its meaning to denote now the whole of Christian teaching with all its implications, and could nowadays best be glossed 'religion'. (Most neighbouring languages have the cognate *mono,* and there seem to be cognates of this in other parts of the Highlands, e.g. in Melpa (Hagen): *man* 'instruction');

– *bo'ava'a*. This word formerly meant 'his tutor' and denoted a man responsible for the upbringing of a boy with special responsibilities at the time of preparation for and going through initiation. In the Christian context it was adapted to denote 'godfather';

– *deyana/deya'*. This is a term from initiation, and originally denoted a bunch of sharp-edged grass or cane leaves which were pushed into the nostrils of the initiands to induce bleeding. The word was then used in phrases to denote people who had been initiated: *deya' bade* 'initiated boy', *deya' yuva* 'community of the initiated'. As initiation was replaced by confirmation phrases like these came to be used for Christians after confirmation;

– *souve* 'chief', formerly used to denote an important man or fight leader, it was used to express 'Lord', that is, the unspeakable name of God in the Old Testament and the title for God and Jesus;

– *amuna* 'breath' was used to denote the divine 'spirit';

– *eipa ageta havi-* 'to think attentively' or 'to have something in mind' was used to express 'to hope';

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[5]For this term see Wurm and Wilson (1975:54, 89, 107, 197ff.).

– *eipa hago*- 'to be kind, to be tender-hearted' (*eipa* means 'bowels') was employed to express the Christian concept of 'love' or 'mercy';

– *feipana* 'offence', an ethical term in traditional language, was used to denote the Christian concept of 'sin'. Also *gumina,* actually meaning 'theft', changed its meaning to denote 'sin' in a wider sense;

– *fugigina* 'rainbow' and *halo* 'light' came to denote 'glory';

– *fuluna* 'coolness' was used to denote 'peace';

– *gokudana* 'sky' was used for 'heaven';

– *hou' ei*- 'to protect' (*houna/hou'* 'liver') was used to express 'to save';

– *lusa* 'good spell' or 'good magic' came to denote the concept of 'blessing';

– *oune* 'image', originally denoting the shadow or the reflection of a person in water, and also the 'spirit' of a dead person, was used for the concept of 'soul';

– *vato'* or *aeto'* 'set apart, by itself', expressing something which engendered awe in people in the traditional culture, came to denote the concept of 'holy'.

Some expressions denoting cultural matters which were connected with religion, entered the value system, and have been retained, as they have to do with Scripture and other religious literature:

haeya	leaf	was used for	page
viva	larger partition in garden	was used for	chapter
fologana	smaller partition in garden	was used for	verse

In quite a number of instances Yagaria terms were used to form calques or 'loan-translations'. Models for these 'manufactured' expressions came from either Kafe/Kamano or from Kâte.[6]

Examples:

– *age* 'report, reputation' and *soko* 'good' were put together to form the phrase *soko age,* denoting 'good news, gospel';

– *einaga* 'inside, mind', was connected with *yahae' hu*- 'to turn' to form the phrase *einaga yahae' hu*- to denote 'to repent'. This calque was formed from a Kâte phrase but could have been drawn as well from the Tok Pisin expression *tanim bel;*

– *amuna/amu'* 'breath', together with *vato'* 'holy', resulted in the phrase *Vato' Amu'* to express the Christian concept 'Holy Spirit';

– the word *bonona/bono'* 'religion' was used in the formation of quite a number of calques, like *bono' nina* 'religion water' for 'baptism', *bono' yona* 'religion house' for 'church' or 'chapel', *bono' yoke* 'religion song' for 'hymn', *bono' ge* 'religion word' for 'sermon' or for 'Bible'.

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[6]Nida (1964:214) describes such loan translations as "manufacturing terms with indigenous lexical components", and McElhanon (1975:130ff.) who describes the same process in Selepet, speaks of "literalizations of Kâte expressions".

4. CONCLUSION

The question which arises from the observations in Yagaria is: do these different developments in the various linguistic fields have any special significance, as far as language change in general is concerned?

The fact that loans are mainly used for cultural innovations but that indigenous lexical material is mainly employed for alterations in the field of values points to the important conservative and retarding role which the values and the terms standing for them obviously play in the development and change of a language. In the wake of cultural change language change is inevitable. If such change is achieved only through the introduction of loans, the language, even if it remains structurally the same, may soon become changed beyond recognition. Terms to denote values are therefore important factors not only in keeping a language alive but in preserving the identity of the language in the midst of all changes.

The wholistic character of religion has disappeared in many indigenous societies of Papua New Guinea and life has become 'compartmentalised'. Yet now that there is such a compartment as 'religion' with a 'language' used to express and to communicate the values which are important in this compartment it seems that here is a factor which should not be underestimated in its importance for the survival of languages.

Even without the work of the missions the traditional religious values in their wholistic form most probably would have been doomed under the impact of all the new outside influences. It is obvious that the terms denoting them survived, but survived only by being adapted to denote the new religious values.

Through semantic changes in its vocabulary the language was adapted to the changing times and could continue to be used. That the values had also undergone changes, and these changes had been implanted in the language, was of additional benefit for the survival of the language at this time. Nowadays Yagaria is still being used for Christian life and worship. Many hymns in Yagaria, with local tunes, are still sung. Religions, having a retarding and conserving element about them, are strong agents in keeping traditions, including linguistic traditions, alive.

As the French sociolinguist Calvet (1978:64) notes: "It is known that religions have succeeded in keeping alive the languages which they have defended against the winds and waves of history". Thus a language, intrinsically connected with an established and practiced religion, has an added advantage for survival.

In support of this statement I would like to relate some personal experience from Europe. I spent part of my childhood during the years preceding World War II in the Sorbic area in the eastern part of Germany. During the Third Reich in Germany linguistic minorities like the Sorbs, who speak a West-Slavic language, had a hard time retaining their cultural and linguistic identity, since the official policy was that everything had to be 'Germanised'. Sorbic schools were not allowed any more, and the speaking of Sorbic in public was ridiculed. Within families Sorbic was widely used of course, sometimes exclusively. And another place where the power of the state did not succeed in eradicating the Sorbic language was in church. Sorbic church services were still conducted, and the attendance at those services exceeded by far that at the German services. Thus religion has contributed strongly to the survival of the Sorbic language to date.

The fact that religion is very vital for language conservation ought to be realised in Papua New Guinea today especially in view of the threat to the survival of many of its languages.

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