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# The Influence of Christianity on the Indigenous Languages of Taiwan: a Bunun Case Study

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## Abstract

This paper discusses two major ways in which the introduction of Christianity exerted an important influence on the Bunun language. In the second half of the twentieth century, Christian churches were instrumental in the protection of indigenous languages, including Bunun, against the cultural and linguistic unification policies of the Taiwanese government. In a different way, work on Bible translation in Bunun has resulted in the creation of a pan-dialectal religious vocabulary and led to the creation of a de facto standard variant of the language based on the Isbukun dialect. Today, a complex relationship exists between this written standard and other Bunun dialects.

## Keywords

Bunun – Austronesian languages of Taiwan – standardisation – Bible translation – Christian missionaries – Christianity in Taiwan

## 1 Introduction

The Bunun people are an Austronesian people traditionally living in or near the Central Mountain Range of Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> Their language has been studied in

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the Workshop on Special Genres in and around Indonesia at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) on 17–19 February 2013. Changes in the present article are substantial and it supersedes this initial presentation, which was included in the workshop proceedings as De Busser (2013). New data in this paper was gathered as part of the project ‘The influence of Christianity on the Bunun language’, funded by

terms of its linguistic particularities (for instance, De Busser, 2009; Jeng, 1977; L. Li, 2018) and its relationship to other Austronesian languages of Taiwan (for instance, Zeitoun, Huang, Yeh, Chang & Wu, 1996; H.-C. Huang, 2006). However, linguistic investigations into the Bunun language have largely overlooked one social force, which has been a major influence on Bunun and most other Austronesian languages in Taiwan during the past century: the introduction of various forms of Christianity by Western and Han missionaries.

In the light of the obvious importance of the Christian religion in the lives of many present-day indigenous people in Taiwan, it is surprising that the relationship between language and religion has received little systematic attention in the field of Formosan linguistics.<sup>2</sup> One notable exception is T.-Y. Li (2016), who discusses in detail the role of Bible translations on the development of written forms of the indigenous languages of Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> This absence of systematic attention might be because of a reluctance among linguists to recognise the influence of what is essentially an imported (some would argue imposed) Western religion on a fragile indigenous language. In the field of language description and documentation, there is often a tendency to focus on 'pure' or 'original' linguistic knowledge, unadulterated by external cultural influences that are believed to lead indigenous cultures and their languages to their impending doom (see e.g. Mühlhäusler, 1996). While missionary movements throughout history certainly have played their role in the demise of indigenous cultures, linguistic or anthropological research should not ignore the fact that in particular cases the influence of Christianisation has been beneficial, or simply neutral. Importantly, all Bunun and Paiwan indigenous communities in Taiwan today that I have visited consider it an inherent part of their cultural and religious identity.

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, one could argue that Christian organisations, and the creation of a modern religious linguistic idiom, have been contributing factors to the continued survival of some of the Austronesian languages of Taiwan, Bunun being one of them.

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- 2 Research on the linguistic efforts of European missionaries as part of the Dutch and Spanish colonisation of Taiwan in the seventeenth century will not be discussed in this article; see Heylen (2001) for a historical overview of the linguistic implications of the Dutch missionary movement of that period on aboriginal groups in southwestern Taiwan.
- 3 In contrast, anthropological studies on the introduction of Christianity are plentiful. Representative substantial publications on the relationship between the Christian faith and Bunun culture are Y. Huang (1988), Chen (2006), Yang (2008) and Fang (2016).

Since their arrival in Taiwan at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, two major strands of Christianity, Catholicism and Presbyterianism, have influenced the Bunun language in two major ways, namely by being socially and politically involved in the protection of indigenous languages, and by translating religious texts in indigenous languages. Section 2 describes how in the beginning of the twentieth 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, the remainder of this section will first give a short overview of the Bunun language.

### 1.1 *The Bunun Language*

Bunun (ISO 639-3: *bnn*) is one of the Austronesian languages spoken in Taiwan. Its word structure is complex: in the Takivatan dialect, over 200 distinct affixes have been recorded, the majority verbal prefixes (De Busser, 2009). This provides a powerful mechanism for creating new verbal meanings. For instance, the verbal form *qansiap* ‘understand’ can through productive affixes be transformed into *pin-qansiap* ‘CAUS.INCH-understand’ > ‘make (somebody) understand’ and *is-pin-qansiap* ‘INSTR-CAUS.INCH-understand’ > ‘make (somebody) appreciate’. Nouns and verbs are the two major open word classes, that is, word classes with a large membership that easily create new words. Concepts that in many other languages are expressed by adjectives are in Bunun expressed by a subclass of verbs rather than a separate word class (De Busser, 2009: 524; L. Li, 2018: 126). Word class boundaries are relatively fluid, in the sense that many roots can function as both nouns and verbs (De Busser, 2009: 178–189). Bunun dialects have a verb-initial word order, that is, the main verb occurs in the initial position in the clause, before its arguments. They have a complex system of verbal agreement that is sometimes referred to as a Philippine-style or a symmetrical voice system (Blust, 2002; Himmelmann, 2002). Typically, a distinction is made between at least five different voices (agent, patient, location, beneficiary, and instrumental voice); each turn a different semantic role into the topic of the clause.

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 eighteenth century (see P. Li, 2001; Palalavi, 2006).

TABLE 1 Bunun dialects

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

Note: Information about the location of all five dialects on a village level can be found in Lin (2018).

Already during the Japanese Occupation, a distinction was made between five Bunun clans that belonged to three larger subgroups (see e.g. Ogawa & Asai, 1935: 585ff). This distinction corresponds to five major dialects, and to a clear pattern of dialectal differentiation (Table 1). While most dialects are relatively homogenous, anecdotal evidence suggests that a considerable degree of diversity exists within the Isbukun dialect, in particular between the varieties spoken in Nantou and those in Taitung and Kaohsiung.

Differentiation on the level of grammar, sound system and pronunciation, and vocabulary is considerable, especially between Isbukun and other dialects, although older Bunun speakers report they can communicate with speakers of other dialects with relatively little effort. As I will discuss below, this differentiation between dialects is counteracted by sociocultural factors, many of which are related to the introduction of Christianity.

Few systematic comparisons between Bunun dialects have been conducted, with the exception of the work of P. Li (1988), who proposes a reconstruction of the Bunun dialect tree based on phonological and lexical variations between dialects. Below are some common phonological differences between Isbukun and the other dialects (examples are from P. Li, 1988 and my data)<sup>4</sup>:

1. Where Central and Northern dialects have uvular /q/, Isbukun often has /χ/, as in Isb *hasila* /χasila/ vs. Tbz/Tvn/Tba/Tdh *qasila* /qasila/ 'salt'.
2. Intervocalic glottal stops are considerably less common in Isbukun than in other dialects, e.g. Isb *maun* /mawn/ vs. Tbz/Tvn *maun* /mawn/ or *ma'un* /maʔun/ 'eat'.

4 Isb: Isbukun, Tbz: Takbanuaz, Tvn: Takivatan, Tba: Takibakha, Tdh: Takituduh. Words in italics are forms in the conventional spelling; forms between slanted brackets represent phonological representations largely following the International Phonetic Alphabet.

3. Isbukun /t/ has an allophone /tʃ/ before the front vowel /i/ which is largely absent in other dialects. Instead, Central dialects tend to have /t/ and Takibakha the affricate /ts/, e.g. Isb *cina* /tʃina/ vs. Tbz/Tvn *tina* /tina/ vs. Tba *cina* /tsina/ 'mother'.

These phonological differences will be relevant in section 4.2. My data draws mainly on the research I conducted between 2005 and 2016 on the Takivatan dialect of Bunun as spoken in Bahuan (馬遠村, *mayuan cun*) in Hualien County on the east coast of Taiwan, and Takbanuaz as spoken in Sinapalan (新鄉村, *xin xiang cun*), a village deep in the Central Mountain Range in Nantou County.

## 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 organisation was relatively loose. When overpopulation, depleted hunting grounds, or interpersonal conflict started to create social friction, family groups would split off from the main village and establish new settlements elsewhere. This probably explains the large geographical spread of the Bunun tribe across the interior of Taiwan, from Kaohsiung City in the south to Nantou in the north.

Despite their geographical spread, 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. However, it often has a more abstract meaning, and then also includes 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 up to the third degree of consanguinity in the maternal or paternal line.

Agriculture centred on various types of millet (rather than rice), sweet potato, and yam. Utilised 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 occupied (and still occupies) 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 men and was a strict taboo for women. Success in

the hunt was an important factor of social prestige and was indicated in the ceremonial headdress of each hunter.

Before and during initial phases of the Japanese Occupation (1895–1945), intertribal warfare and violent conflict with Sinitic populations that encroached on aboriginal land<sup>5</sup> were common. Interethnic violence often involved head-hunting, which in a number of Austronesian tribes in Taiwan was part of a coming-of-age ritual for male members of the tribe. Among Bunun, this habit had probably all but disappeared by the beginning of the twentieth century, and it completely died out with the coming of Christian missionaries to aboriginal areas immediately after the Second World War.

Bunun tribes, clans, or family groups did not have strong centralised leadership or strong social stratification. Important decisions were made by consensus, after meetings between the elders in the community. For war and hunting expeditions, Bunun chose leaders by common consent based on their experience and status in the community. The social status of adult males depended on their success as hunters and headhunters, as expressed by the number of human skulls and animal skulls or bones acquired in previous expeditions (see Y.-K. 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 around a belief that human lives are influenced by spirits (in Isbukun, called *hanitu*; in other dialects, *qanitu*).<sup>6</sup> Family members who had passed away were buried in the house, and it was believed that their spirits would protect the family. The environment as a whole was under the domain of the sky (*dihanin* or *diquanin*), an amorphous force that could manifest itself through celestial and climatic phenomena. Most notable was the moon, with whom man had made a covenant that determined the strict system of rituals (*lus'an*) and social taboos (*samu*) governing every aspect of life including the selection of marriage partners, times for the hunt and agricultural activities, and restrictions on certain foodstuffs during certain periods of the year. Many acts related to agriculture, hunting, or social activities needed to be preceded by fixed rituals. Transgression of taboos or nonadherence to rituals was believed to bring adversity and even death on the

5 Davidson (1903: 252–253) describes constant fighting between aboriginal groups living in the mountains and the Sinitic population from 1885 to 1894, largely as a consequence of a pacification campaign by the then-governor Liu Ming-Chuan (劉銘傳) that aimed to open up aboriginal land for camphor exploitation.

6 Fang (2016: 51–62) describes different types of spiritual beings and forces in traditional Bunun cosmology and their purported significance.

family or group. Central to the Bunun religious experience was the concept of *matibahi*, the interpretation of prophetic dreams before significant decisions related to one's life, work on the land, the hunt, and so on. Before the coming of Christianity and modern medicine, various distinct types of shamans or sorcerers, often women, formed a bridge with the supernatural world and worked as healers. For instance, in case of life-threatening illness, healers changed the first name of a person to deflect the evil influence of the disease.

## 2.2 *Japanese Rule*

The beginning of the twentieth century brought great changes to traditional Bunun society, as it did to all Austronesian cultures in Taiwan. A first major change happened when the Qing dynasty ceded Taiwan to Japan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895. The Taiwanese people 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, on which Japan had a near-monopoly. 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, indigenous groups living in the high mountains met unwanted intrusions in their territory with violence. Early on, the Japanese administration reacted mainly by sending military expeditions (*Report on the Control of the Aborigines in Formosa*, 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). Increasingly, the government presented itself as a benevolent provider, in an attempt 'to attract aboriginal people into peaceful contact with the colonial authority and to win over their support, followed by an attempt to assimilate and to "civilize" them' (Yang, 2005: 491).

By 1920, the situation had sufficiently stabilised for the colonial administration to institute a reservation system, although occasional violent conflicts between the Bunun and the Japanese would still occur until the early 1930s. In order to make it easier to administrate their unruly subjects, the colonial government 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 the structure of Bunun society. The importance of the family unit under the leadership of the eldest male diminished. 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 onwards, Bunun social organisation would have a double hierarchy. On an official 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 (in many communities this is still the case today).

Despite the oppressive and sometimes brutal treatment by Japanese colonial administrators, the Japanese Occupation after the 1920s brought most aboriginal communities significant 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 developed a modern road network and introduced modern medicine, sanitation, and schooling for all children up to the age of 12. Overall, living conditions greatly improved.

### 2.3 *Christianity*

A second transformative change would come to Bunun society after World War II. Christianity in its modern form had come to Taiwan from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in the form of waves of European and Canadian missionaries.<sup>7</sup> According to Dong (2008: 368), the Catholic priests Fernando Sainz and Angel Bofurul were the first who were allowed to establish a mission in what is now the southern port city of Kaohsiung in 1859. The Presbyterian Church soon followed: the English minister James L. Maxwell came to Tainan in 1865 and George L. Mackay to Tamsui near the northernmost tip of Taiwan in 1872.

Missionaries initially established themselves in urban centres. Very often, the Chinese population met proselytization attempts with indifference or overt hostility. As a result, missionaries of all denominations swiftly directed much of their attention to the so-called Plains Aborigines, various Sinicised indigenous groups living in the lowlands of Taiwan. As early as 1861, Spanish Catholic priests established missions with the Siraya and the Makatau,

7 Richardson (1972) gives a detailed overview of this process.



on the west coast of Taiwan. The mountainous interior and the east of the country (the present counties of Hualien and Taitung) were off-limits, since they were 'at that time in the hands of the fierce mountain aborigines who were headhunters and resisted all incursions both by the Chinese and by European missionaries' (Richardson, 1972: 21).

After the 1895 handover, the new colonial government issued a general prohibition of Christian missionaries to engage in any missionary activities with the 'wild' tribes in the interior and east coast of Taiwan. This was partly to protect the missionaries, but probably more because the Japanese administration was deeply suspicious of the attitudes of Western missionaries towards their rather brutal pacification campaigns in indigenous territory and 'thought Christianity might disturb the natives' social lives and even trigger insurrection against colonists' (Fang, 2016: 8).

With the exceptions of occasional contact and clandestine attempts to proselytize, it was therefore only after the Second World War that indigenous villages in the interior of Taiwan saw the arrival of Presbyterian vicars and Catholic priests. One of the first was Rev. Hu Wen-Chi (胡文池), a Presbyterian minister of Han descent who was sent to Eastern Taiwan in October 1947 to set up a mission among the Bunun. The initial success of this missionary enterprise was limited, as Christianity was seen as 'the religion of the Amelika (Americans), which did not concern the Bunun' (Yang, 2008: 55), and was in fact in opposition to Bunun tradition. It did not help that early Han missionaries often categorically opposed traditional Bunun shamans, ritual practices, and spiritual and moral beliefs.

When missionaries started offering healthcare and food relief as incentives and more local evangelists got involved in the proselytization effort, the number of converts gradually increased. Often this conversion process involved a syncretic integration of elements of traditional Bunun spirituality and morality into the newly introduced Western religion, a process that is described for the Presbyterian Church in detail by Fang (2016). This eventually led to the indigenisation of the Presbyterian and Catholic churches. Religious writings such as the Bible and hymnbooks were translated into Bunun. Today religious services in many churches are held entirely and partly in Bunun, and church officials are generally expected to have a good command of the language. This is a strict requirement for Presbyterian pastors graduating from the Yu-shan Theological Seminary near Hualien; almost all pastors that are eventually stationed in Bunun villages are members of the Bunun tribe. Most Bunun today 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).

At present, a large proportion of Bunun identifies either as Presbyterian or as Catholic.<sup>8</sup> The distribution of these two denominations, which are often competing for members in the same communities, varies from village to village. Bahuan, a Takivatan Bunun village in Hualien, has both a Catholic and a Presbyterian church for slightly over 3,700 inhabitants, half of which belong to the former and half to the latter denomination. Sinapalan in Nantou only has a Presbyterian church and a majority of inhabitants are attending it.

### 3 Christianity and the Preservation of Indigenous Languages

#### 3.1 Cultural Impact

The impact of missionary enterprises on Bunun culture is a matter of debate. On the one hand, it goes beyond doubt that Christianity has largely replaced traditional religion. Nowadays, a Bunun village will nearly always have a church, whereas shamans and many traditional rituals have all but disappeared. This was to a considerable extent caused by the active opposition of early missionaries towards traditional beliefs and especially healers and sorcerers who were seen 'by Han Taiwanese missionaries as one of the worst manifestations of the bygone Bunun past' (Fang, 2016: 113–114). Especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the result was that many Bunun saw Christianity as a foreign intrusion.

On the other hand, missionaries made great efforts to involve local evangelists in the proselytization process. Already on 15 September 1946, the Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary (玉山神學院, *yu shan shen xue yuan*) was founded near Hualien by Rev. James Dickson, with the express purpose of educating aboriginal Presbyterian ministers (Qiu, You & Zhang, 1998: 511). The Catholic Church relied more on foreign missionaries. However, these priests typically lived in or near aboriginal communities, had indigenous lay assistants, and became fully fluent in the local languages. The result was a gradual indigenisation process, in which especially Bunun ministers and evangelists attempted to create a synergy between traditional knowledge systems and the new Christian faith (Fang, 2016). Gradually, Christianity became a marker of Bunun identity and churches often played an active role in protecting Bunun culture from cultural and linguistic unification policies during the martial law era (1949–1987).

8 The exact percentage is unclear. Lardinois, Chan, and Ryden (2004: 114) states that approximately 85% of the indigenous population are baptized. Fang (2016: 2–3) notes that church membership has dropped rapidly and that in 2011 only 25% of the Bunun population were still member of the Presbyterian Church. No data is available for the Catholic Church, but attrition is probably at least as fast. Conservatively, we can estimate active church participation across denominations at somewhat under 50%.

Thus, the growing consensus among scholars in Taiwan is that Christianity in Taiwan, despite its foreign origin and contrary to the conception of Christianity as a force destructive to indigenous culture, has overall exerted a 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 to 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 in opposition to the Kuomintang government, churches in Taiwan have always been staunch protectors of aboriginal rights and languages. This surprising and sometimes contradictory relationship between Christianity and aboriginal languages is the topic of the remainder of this article.

### 3.2 *Missionaries and Indigenous Languages*

Missionaries who came to Taiwan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, irrespective of their denomination, made a conscious choice to proselytize and preach in the language of the community, and it is clear that their intention was to evolve towards linguistically indigenised churches. This meant that they needed to study and learn the local language.

In Hualien County, on 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, these works were never formally published and therefore, like many missionary texts, are not widely available to the public. Missionaries were not the only early producers of such language materials, but they were in a unique position in that they lived and worked in communities, often for many decades, and therefore acquired an intimate knowledge of the local languages.

Once established, foreign and Chinese missionaries encouraged indigenous members of their churches to be educated as evangelists or ministers. At the Presbyterian Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary, this included language courses in classical and local languages, and prospective ministers were (and still are) expected to attain fluency in the languages of their future congregations.

Crucial to the indigenisation of local churches was the translation of the Holy Scripture, and this required the development of a written language. The Presbyterian Hu Wen-Chi started to learn Bunun when he first arrived in Hualien County in 1947. Two years later, in 1949, he published a Romanisation system for Bunun and a booklet with a translation of Noah's flood, and held a first Bible study group. Participants discussed Biblical stories, learned to read and write Bunun, and under the direction of Pastor Hu set out to translate the Bible

into their native language. The result, a Romanised translation of the Gospel of Matthew, was published in 1951, the first Biblical text to be published in a Taiwanese indigenous language.

Unfortunately, new cultural assimilation policies from the KMT government in 1951 prohibited the use of Roman scripts for representing indigenous languages. Instead, the translators were forced to employ Bopomofo (注音符號, *zhu yin fu hao*), a script developed for the phonological transcription of Mandarin that was unsuitable for the representation of the Austronesian languages of Taiwan. This prohibition, and growing ideological conflict between Hu Wen-Chi and native Bunun translators (Fang, 2016: 155–167), slowed down Bunun translation efforts. Table 2 is a chronological overview of translations that have appeared over the years. With the exception of the 1991 parallel New Testament, translated in the Takivatan dialect of Bunun by a Catholic priest, and the 2011 unpublished Presbyterian translation of the Gospels in the Takituduh dialect, all publications were the work of the team of Hu Wen-Chi and its successors. The 1983 New Testament involved the help of Benz Titus, a Swiss Catholic priest. The current 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 (Bible Society in Taiwan,

TABLE 2 Chronology of Bunun translation of Bible texts

Year	Books	Dialect	Script
1949	Story of Noah's Flood	Isbukun	Roman
1951	Matthew	Isbukun	Roman
1955	Luke	Isbukun	Zhuyin fuhao
1959	Acts	Isbukun	Zhuyin fuhao
1962	Timothy 1–2	Isbukun	Zhuyin fuhao
1983	Abbreviated NT	Isbukun	Roman
1990	Parallel partial NT	Takivatan	Roman
1993	Jonah, Micah	Isbukun	Roman
2000	Partial OT, Complete NT	Isbukun	Roman
2011	Four Gospels	Takituduh	Roman
2017	Complete NT	Takituduh	Roman

Notes: OT: Old Testament; NT: New Testament. Names indicate books of the Bible. A partial OT typically contains the first five books of the Old Testament and a selection of remaining books. An abbreviated NT contains the four gospels and a selection of the remaining books. Data is from the website of the Bible Society in Taiwan (<http://www.bstwn.org/>), T.-Y. Li (2016: 291), and information gathered by the present author.

2000). At the time of writing, a team is completing a reworked version, containing a translation of the complete Bible.

Especially in earlier times individual translators might undertake a Bible translation by themselves, but nowadays, especially for translations coordinated by the Bible Society in Taiwan, a translation team is involved that minimally consists of one or more main translators, native translation consultants, and consultant theologians. Up to the 1970s, translation work for most indigenous communities in Taiwan was under the direction of Western or Han Chinese missionaries (T.-Y. Li, 2016: 114–115). Later, the involvement of local indigenous clergy and church communities grew considerably. Translating a large religious text such as the Bible is a substantial task that, as Table 2 shows, can take many years. It is therefore no surprise that, of the 16 recognised Austronesian languages of Taiwan, only Amis and Truku have complete translations.

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). In section 4, I will discuss more elaborately the influence of the current translation on the Bunun language based on linguistic data.

### 3.3 *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 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 to campaign for official recognition for Taiwan’s indigenous population (Hsieh, 1994).

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 (*shan bao*) or ‘mountain compatriots’, which was considered politically charged and racist, with 原住民族 (*yuan zhu min zu*), literally ‘original inhabitants’ but often translated as ‘indigenous people’.

These groups did not solely focus on the protection of aboriginal languages, but their actions eventually led to the official recognition of several aboriginal

tribes in Taiwan and the establishment in 1996 of the Council of Aboriginal Affairs, renamed the Council for Indigenous Peoples in 2002. This government body is, among other things, responsible for the implementation of mother-tongue education projects in aboriginal communities and 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*

The translation of any written work requires choices about the exact language variety, vocabulary, and style. For the 2000 Bible translation in Bunun (referred to below as the Bunun Bible), it was decided to rely on the Isbukun dialect. This is already evident from the title of the book, *Tama Dihanin tu Halinga*; in the Takivatan and Takbanuaz dialect /h/ in Isbukun would appear as /q/, resulting in *Tama Diqanin tu Qalinga*.

This choice could be justified by the fact that Isbukun is the largest and most studied dialect, but it is equally plausible that it is the result of historical accident: when Rev. Hu Wen-Chi moved to eastern Taiwan, he ended up in Guanshan (關山, *guan shan*), where he happened to learn Bunun from Isbukun nurses at the local hospital. Whatever the reason, the choice of base dialect has repercussions because, as we hinted at in section 1.1, there are considerable grammatical, phonological, and lexical differences between the five Bunun dialects. However, the choice is also unavoidable: for practical reasons it is not possible to create Bible translations for each variant of every language.<sup>9</sup>

There are two important consequences. First, the present translation created a de facto super-dialectal and super-regional standard of Bunun. Given its wide distribution and its importance to the lives of a considerable proportion of Bunun people (probably more so to the Presbyterians than the Catholics), the language of the Bible exerts an influence on members of the community outside the geographical area of the dialect it is based on. The Bunun Bible has to some extent given Isbukun the status of a written standard variety.

9 Alternative strategies are possible: for the Amis Bible translation, translators opted to blend multiple dialects into the translation, creating a mixed-dialect standard. Certain dialectal differences in the lexicon were employed to express semantic contrasts. For instance, *kafong* and *tamohong* mean 'hat' in Central and Southern Amis dialects respectively; in the Bible translation, the former refers to a normal hat and the latter to a crown, a concept previously not existing in the Amis language (T.-Y. Li 2016: 151–153).

Because the Bible is central to religious practice, often on a daily basis, one would expect that it exerts a disproportionate influence on the language use of non-Isbukun speakers, and that this eventually contributes to dialect levelling.

A second consequence is that to members of Takbanuaz, Takivatan, Takibakha, and Takituduh communities the language of the Bible is not closely related to their common vernacular. This is not necessarily problematic: the English King James Bible was relatively remote from the English vernacular but still had a major influence on the English language. One should acknowledge that, as a literary work, any Bible translation is by its nature different from spoken vernacular: there are considerable differences between the language of the Bunun Bible and spoken Isbukun. However, the Isbukun slant of the Bunun Bible does mean that it is comparatively less accessible to non-Isbukun language users, and this affects people's interaction with religious materials. There is some awareness of this fact, and a limited countermovement exists that tries to work towards more localised translations of the Bible (Istasipal, 2002).

#### 4.2 *Illustrations*

The following two short fragments can serve as an illustration of the difference between the language of the Bunun Bible and that of the Takivatan dialect of Bunun. A first segment consists of the three initial sentences of the Bunun translation of the Biblical creation story (Gen. 1:1–2).

- (1) *Masa kitngab Sasbinaz Dihanin kauni mas dalah dihanin.*

*masa kitngab Sasbinaz Dihanin ka-'uni 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 niang min'aiza.*

*iskakaupa hai ma-dumdum ni-ang min-'aiza*  
 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 Sasbinaz Dihanin tamasaz hai makadadaza sia danum.*

*itu Sasbinaz Dihanin tamasaz hai maka-da-daza sia danum*  
 this.here lord heaven strength TPC MOVE-DISTR-above ANAPH water  
 'And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' (Bunun Bible)

As a contrast, the first two sentences of the introduction to a story told in Takivatan, the Central dialect spoken in Bahuan, in Hualien County follows.

- (4) *Tangusang matumaskain, sia tu, sasaipuk kamisama madaidaz mapiszang, maqtu haip tu sanavan minsuma'a sia tu, takahan tupaun tu Bilisi tu tais'an, a, tupaun, a, tuna'iti tupaun tu Pian.*

*tangus-ang matumaskain sia tu sa-saipuk kamisama*  
 first-PROG be.grateful ANAPH ATTR CV-take.care.of God

*ma-daidaz ma-piszang 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-UV COMPL Belgium ATTR

*tais'an-a tupa-un-a tauna'iti tupa-un tu Pian*  
 relative-LNK call-UV-LNK PERL-here say-UV 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, na'asa dau, ta'aza tu maquaqa mita pauntu bununa munga minhaiza miqumis.*

*ai aupa a sia tu na-min-suma na-asa dau*  
 INTER thus INTER ANAPH ATTR IRR-INCH-return IRR-want EMO

*ta'aza tu maquaqa-a mita paun tu bunun-a*  
 listen COMPL how.come-LNK 1I.N be.said COMPL people-LNK

*munga min-haiza 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.' (Takivatan Bunun)

Section 1.1 mentions a number of phonological contrasts between Isbukun and other Bunun dialects, and some of these are relevant here. Where the Bible and the Isbukun dialect have /h/, the Central dialects generally have a voiceless uvular stop /q/. *Dalah* 'land' and *dihanin* 'heaven' in the Bible (see ex. 1) would



in Takivatan be *dalaq* and *diqanin*. In certain words, Takivatan /h/ corresponds to a glottal stop /ʔ/ in the Biblical text; compare *minhaiza* /minhaiða/ ‘come into existence’ in ex. (5) with *minʔaiza* /minʔaiða/ in (2).

Perhaps unexpectedly, the short text samples above also illustrate a fair number of fundamental grammatical differences. The prenominal oblique case marker *mas* in (1) appears in the Bible and the Isbukun dialect, but no such marker has been attested in Takivatan. In fact, the Takivatan dialect has no case marking on noun phrases at all and only marks grammatical roles morphologically in pronominal forms. In example (2) from the Bible, *hai* functions as a topicalizer that left-dislocates the topic argument; Takivatan instead uses the marker *-a*, as is illustrated below:

- (6) *aipun-a*            *ma-sihal*            *tu*            *bunun*  
       that.one-TPC    STAT-good        ATTR        people  
       ‘That one, he is a good man.’ (Takivatan Bunun)

This bound morpheme *-a* also functions as a general linking element, as in (5) *maquaqa-a* ‘how.come-LNK’. The form *-a* occurs also as a linker (but not as a topicalizer) in most varieties of spoken Isbukun but has so far not been attested in 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 it has not been attested in Takivatan.

There are more interesting lexical differences between Biblical Bunun and the Takivatan dialect than is clear from the examples above. Most of these are relatively mundane, and do not lead to any misunderstandings; some examples are given in Table 3.

They become interesting when they pertain to the central tenets of the Christian conceptual world. For instance, the word *sasbinʔaz* (or *sasbinaz*)

TABLE 3    Examples of lexical differences

Meaning	Bunun Bible	Takivatan
‘many’	<i>supah</i>	<i>madia</i>
‘understand’	<i>haiap</i>	<i>qansiap</i>
‘suddenly’	<i>cisha</i>	<i>musu</i>
‘woman’	<i>maluspingaz</i>	<i>binanauʔaz</i>
‘incarcerate’	<i>maʔiksub</i>	<i>madamu</i>

originally refers to figures of authority, such as political and military leaders, and police officers. It is best translated in English as 'lord'. In the Takivatan, *sasbin'az* is commonly used to refer to Jesus and to the Christian God. In the Bible translation, the term exclusively refers to God, unless it is used in the construction *Sasbinaz Iesu Kilistu* 'the Lord Jesus Christ'.

On a stylistic level, the Takivatan sample contains a number of interjections and pause markers. Examples are *sia tu* in ex. (4), a hesitation marker that is the pragmatic equivalent of English *y'know*, and the interjections *ai* and *a* in ex. (5). It also has longer, more convoluted sentences. These final features are probably indicative of the fact that this is a spoken rather than written text, and not of any dialectal variation. Note that the contrasts discussed here are based on a small text sample. A systematic study would bring a considerably higher number of phonological, lexical, and grammatical contrasts to light.

## 5 Conclusion

For the past century, Christianity has exerted a major influence on the lives of a 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 surrounding community. It also affected the Bunun language, as we demonstrated in this article.

On balance, this influence has not been altogether negative. In an early phase of the Christianisation process, Christianity displaced the traditional animist belief systems of the Bunun, and this was by design. On the other hand, missionaries and evangelists in Taiwan were no agents of 'the devastating impact of European colonization in the Pacific region which created discontinuities in transmission' of local languages (Mühlhäusler, 1996: 137), for the simple reason that they were not part of the Japanese colonial enterprise, and later the authoritarian rule of the KMT, but existed *in opposition to it*. This has contributed to their swift acceptance and indigenisation.

Various denominations in Taiwan often went to great lengths to preach and write in local languages, and incorporated aspects of traditional culture into their religious praxis. Throughout the twentieth century, Christian organisations and in particular the Presbyterian Church were among the staunchest defenders of Taiwanese indigenous cultures and languages, at a time when the Nationalist government had implemented aggressive one-language policies.

Ostensibly, without this activism, languages like Bunun would be much worse off than they are today.

Central to the introduction of Christianity and its internalisation into Bunun culture was the translation of the Bible. This required the transposition of a conceptual universe that was alien to and sometimes incongruous with traditional belief systems. Section 4 discussed the linguistic mechanisms involved in this process. In translating the Bible, the dominant Isbukun dialect was selected as a translation base, creating a de facto written standard of the language and leading to an ongoing process of dialect levelling. At present, it is not clear whether this serves as a unifying power that makes the Bunun language more resilient to language erosion than individual dialects in isolation would have been, or whether it contributes to language loss in communities speaking minority dialects. What is evident is that Christianity has had and may continue to have an effect on both the fine-grained and global structure of the Bunun language.

## 6 Glossary: Selected Linguistic Terms

1I: first-person inclusive; 1S: first-person singular; 2S: second-person singular; ANAPH: anaphoric pronoun; ATTR: attributive marker; CAUS: causative; COMPL: complementizer; CV: CV reduplication; DISTR: distributive; DYN: dynamic verbal prefix; EMO: emotive; INCH: inchoative; INSTR: instrumental; INTER: interjection; IRR: irrealis; LNK: linker; LV: locative voice; N: neutral (non-subject) case (Takivatan); NEG: negator; OBL: oblique case (Isbukun); PERL: perlativ verbal prefix; POSS: possessive; PROG: progressive; STAT: stative verbal prefix; TPC: topicalizer; UV: undergoer voice

Definitions in the following glossary are based on Crystal (2011).

**affricate:** A consonant produced by completely obstructing and then releasing the airstream through a narrow opening in the vocal tract, essentially creating a combination of a stop and a fricative. An example in English is /tʃ/, the first consonant in the word *church*.

**allophone:** A variant pronunciation of a phoneme. Allophones of a phoneme sound differently, either through free variation or because of the environment in which they occur. For instance, in Bunun dialects /s/ is generally realised as /ʃ/ (pronounced as the first sound in English *shawl*) when followed by /i/. Unlike phonemes, this difference in physical properties does not result in a meaning difference.

- case marking:** Grammatical markers on nouns or noun phrases indicating the syntactic relation between noun phrases and other elements in the clause. A typical example is Latin, which distinguishes a nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and ablative case.
- fricative:** A consonant produced by gradually releasing the air in the vocal tract through a narrow opening, leading to audible friction. An example of a fricative in English is /f/, the first consonant in the word *food*.
- glottal stop:** IPA symbol /ʔ/. A consonant produced by complete closure and the subsequent sudden release of the airstream in the vocal cords. A language like English has no phonemic glottal stop, but it appears as a nonphonemic sound in words beginning with a vowel, for instance *aha!* [ʔaha:].
- intervocalic:** Occurring between two vowels.
- oblique:** The case form referring to all forms that are not unmarked. Alternatively, the case form referring to all non-obligatory noun phrases in a clause. In Austronesian languages, the oblique typically marks noun phrases that do not constitute the topic or subject of the clause (those get the nominative case).
- phoneme:** A minimally distinctive sound unit in a language. The exchange of one phoneme for another results in a meaning difference. For instance, in English /d/ and /t/ are different phonemes, as illustrated by the semantic difference between *bed* and *bet*.
- phonology:** The sound system of a language, considered from a perceptual rather than a physical perspective.
- prenominal:** Preceding the noun in a noun phrase.
- stop:** A consonant produced by completely closing and subsequently releasing the airstream in the vocal tract. Examples of stops in English are /b/ and /t/ in the word *bet*.
- topic:** The noun phrase marking the entity which the clause says something about. In Austronesian linguistics, the term topic is often used instead of subject.
- topicalizer:** A grammatical marker indicating the noun phrase that is the topic of the clause. Often, topicalizers moves this noun phrase to the front of the clause.
- uvular:** A consonant produced by pressing the tongue against the uvula (the soft palate).

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