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Semantic Modification of Polynesian Lexicon under the Impact of Christian Teaching

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Human societies and languages used by them are as a rule seldom separated from other societies and languages to such an extent as to be unresponsive to extraneous and sometimes even far-reaching influences. To be sure, the amount of external impact may vary considerably from one society to another, which is due to a variety of factors. In this respect, language plays a major and yet subservient part. One of its tasks is to react as promptly and as adequately as possible.

The efficiency of reaction to the influx of new ideas from outside is a highly desirable structural feature which may be characterized as an ability of the language to generate new lexemes and to assimilate loanwords if necessary. When the impact is too massive and too abrupt, periphrastic (and explanatory) equivalents tend to occur during the first phase, probably because they are (1) semantically transparent and (2) they explain newly introduced phenomena in terms of familiar ones. However, periphrastic equivalents are communicatively clumsy and often are adjusted, modified or replaced by more adequate equifunctional items. The first phase, the phase of shock absorption, may be quite demanding from the viewpoint of language resources, especially if the cultural distance between the donor and the recipient societies is too great.

The situation of interference of two independent and relatively closed conceptual systems is an instance of crosscultural communication - and requires a combined approach comprising elements of comparative study as well as an application of the principles of theory and practice of translation.

A massive contact of two conceptual systems may either result in the rise of a hybrid system when the two interfering systems merge and coalesce (cf. various syncretic religions in Oceania, Africa and elsewhere) - or a system that is in a way more vulnerable crumbles as a whole, only leaving its imprint upon the dominant competitive system. But the result ought not to be qualified as an unconditional capitulation, as a disappearance of the recessive system. The recipient community that has opted for the new conceptual system is capable of digesting, accepting it on condition that some elements of the abandoned system are incorporated in it - and these elements, functioning as a kind of bridge, make the newly adopted system easier to understand.

The survival of such elements is linguistically guaranteed by the phenomenon of semantic motivation (as manifested in the internal form of lexical units) and by a plethora of accompanying associations as well as connotations - in accordance with the well-known tendency of form to lag behind content, to employ old, familiar forms in new, unusual functions. This is no undesirable by-product or flaw but rather a vitally important cognitive mechanism that enables the recipients of a novelty to find their bearings in an entirely new situation and facilitates the assessment of what is novel or strange by means of what is old and customary. However, the modifications in the newly adopted conceptual system must not take place on the higher hierarchical planes - that would amount to a change of identity of the system itself, to its dissolution in the „noise" generated by the other system.

An encounter of two radically different conceptual systems repeatedly took place in various parts of Oceania during the 19th and the 20th centuries in the wake of missionary activities. Christian religious and ethic conceptions were by no means easily compatible with the religious ideas and moral standards of the peoples of Oceania in general and of Polynesia in particular. Many missionaries have been well aware of this fact and felt that if the new creed is to be successfully embraced by the local peoples, it needs to be accommodated. And thus, the prerequisite of its success is inculturation.[1] According to L. J. Luzbetak,[2] each culture as a system has an inventory of its own and this system cannot ignore the specificity of local life style.

It is the aim of this paper to highlight at least some of the conceptual changes that have taken place during the process of the introduction of Christian doctrine.

As it has turned out, the projection of the key ideas of Christian doctrine into the Polynesian linguistic medium could not bypass some facts of the local religious systems.

The following method has been employed to establish how the counterpart of Christian religious terminology has been constructed in two Polynesian languages, Maori and Hawaiian. Sections and individual concepts from the Bible, more precisely from the New Testament,[3] have been investigated to ascertain how the Polynesian languages or rather the competent translators reacted to the necessity of transferring the domain of new ethical values incorporated in the Christian doctrine. Maori and Hawaiian, two closely related Polynesian languages have been selected because the consideration of two such languages makes the study more worthwhile and

1) Ján Komorovský, "Inkulturácia v práci slovenských misionárov", *Slovenský národopis* 39, 1991, 363.

2) Louis Joseph Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, Techny: Divine Word Publications 1963.

3) Paipera Tapu , London:The British and Foreign Bible Society 1958; Kauoha Hou s.a., New York: American Bible Society.

rewarding, as some inevitable variation between these two languages may be observed upon an almost identical cultural and very similar linguistic background.

It is far from surprising that the two Polynesian languages did not have at their disposal a satisfactory semantic and lexical equivalent of the vocabulary within the framework of which the Christian conceptual system is couched. That is why the two languages had to react creatively and promptly to handle the critical situations repeatedly and incessantly arising during the process of translating.

Essentially, three kinds of reaction to the pressing need to extend their expressive potential have been observed to take place in the case of both Maori and Hawaiian:

(1) paraphrase by means of standard words,
(2) semantic shift or modification of available lexical means,
(3) borrowing.

Borrowing is interesting because of pointing out to those ideas that are especially difficult to be transplanted from the model into the target language. Paraphrase may be regarded as a transient and ad hoc solution because it brings about communicatively awkward results - makeshift equivalents that are merely explanatory instead of being lexicologically acceptable. Semantic shift or modification of available lexical means, on the other hand, implies the existence of at least comparable if not equivalent ideas between the donor and the recipient languages. However, this approximate equivalence inevitable leads to interference if not to outright distortions.

When employing the approximate equivalents, the translators have preferably selected and adopted such domestic terms that at least to some extent overlap - semantically and pragmatically - with the conceptual system inherent in the Bible.

Of course, the domestic terms do not exist in isolation but rather as members of a conceptual system and of particular subsystems, e.g., in antonymic pairs and this fact exerts some influence upon the selection of an adequate equivalent. Thus in Polynesian religion and mythology, heaven is viewed as the opposite of earth. On the other hand, the Christian terminology tends to conceptualize it also as the opposite of hell. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that the former term, i.e. heaven, is translated as rangi "heaven, sky" in Maori and lani "heaven, sky" in Hawaiian.[4] However, the term po, a Polynesian equivalent of "nether world, Hades, (eternal) night", has not been accepted as an adequate translation of the Christian hell, maybe because the Polynesian po also tends to be perceived as an antonym of ao

4) Maori examples are verified after Herbert W. Williams, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language*, 1957; Hawaiian examples after Mary Kawena Pukui, *Hawaiian-English Dictionary*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1957.

"light, this world". Another moment that supports the selection of Maori rangi (Hawaiian lani) as the most adequate translational equivalent of heaven is the fact that in Polynesia rangi (lani) is a divine sphere, the seat of gods. At the same time, Polynesian po has been rejected as a possible equivalent of hell because po cannot be viewed as that place where the souls of the deceased persons are subjected to punishment for their deeds. Therefore in this case the translators have opted for a loanword from Hebrew - Maori kehena and Hawaiian gehena.

Highly interesting is the fate of the idea of holiness or sanctity in the Polynesian translations. The content of holiness in Christian religion is defined strictly positively and applies to someone ethically perfect, which extends to human beings and God alike. In Polynesian, the notion of holiness (gods, chiefs and priests are "holy" in the sense of being inaccessible to the common people) as signalized by the word tapu (Hawaiian kapu) overlaps with the notion of (ceremonial) restriction or prohibition and this may be regarded as its primary meaning. Its Polynesian opposite is noa "free from any restrictions, ordinary". Again, noa is no antonym of sanctity in the Christian sense and as such could not find its place in the Christian conceptual system. Despite all the complexities, the Maori Bible employs tapu in the meaning of holy. The Hawaiians have opted for a different solution. They have selected the word hemolele "perfect, faultless, holy, pure in heart, complete, perfection, virtue" - probably because the word kapu was felt to be too inseparably linked to the old religion; we know that the official abolishment of the complicated kapu system in Hawaii in 1819 was meant as a final dismissal of the traditional religion and preparation of the road for Christianity. Under such circumstances the selection of hemolele, a word not burdened with undesirable connotations, seemed a more fitting alternative.

The Polynesian tabu system used to be organically linked to the concept of hara (Hawaiian hala) "violation of tabu". And yet it has been chosen as the adequate equivalent of Christian sin in Maori, and to some extent in Hawaiian as well, although in the latter language hewa "mistake, fault, error, defect, offense, guilt; to err" occurs more frequently. Again, Hawaiian seems to operate more freely with the old conceptual and lexical system than Maori does.

The idea of God is invariably rendered as Atua in Maori and Akua in Hawaiian, despite the fact that atua (akua) refers to any of the numerous gods in Polynesia and not only to them. Its partial synonym Lord is likewise rendered by its closest Polynesian equivalent, i.e. by ariki in Maori (high chief) and by haku in Hawaiian where it is used as a term of address to chiefs. On the other hand, evil spirits, although familiar to Polynesians (cf. Maori Whiro), have not made it to the text of Bible. Again, a loanword was felt to be the better solution to both Maoris and Hawaiians (cf. Hatana "satan" and

rewera "devil" in Maori and Satana "satan" and daimono "demon" in Hawaiian).

The Polynesians had a class of priests (tohunga, tuhuna, kahuna and taura, kaula, etc.) who, in addition to being servants of gods, were also sorcerers, expert craftsmen and guardians of traditional lore. Their position was after all not so very different from Mediaeval Christian priests and monks. And yet the term tohunga (or kahuna, in Hawaiian) was felt to refer to a somewhat different reality than priest or minister, and no wonder the former tends to be avoided in the Maori and Hawaiian translations of New Testament. In the Epistle to the Ephesans (4,11-13), the Maori translation employs the English loanword apotoro "apostle", poropiti "prophet", hepara "pastor" (from shepherd), and minita "minister", in addition to domestic kauwhau "evangelist". Unlike Maori, the Hawaiian translator was more inclined to employ domestic terminology, cf. luna'olelo "apostle", kaula "prophet", ha'i 'olelo "evangelist", and kahuna "ministry"; the idea of pastor is rendered by a compound kahu ekalesia (literally guardian of the church). Thus both terms referring to pre-Christian priests, i.e., kaula and kahuna, have been retained, at least to some extent.

In Polynesian languages there is no exact equivalent of the verb to pray. Modern Maori refers to praying by the verb inoi of which the original (and purely secular) meaning is to beg. Obviously, there were other candidates for naming the sacral activity of praying, such as karakia and pure. However, karakia originally referred to what may be denoted charm or spell. Its overlap with Christian prayer is mainly due to its declamatory execution - of course, in addition to a doubtless supernatural semantic component. Which may explain why church is termed whare karakia (whare "house") in Maori and hale pule in Hawaiian.

Another Polynesian word from the same semantic field is pure. Although it designates above all the ceremony for removing tapu, expressions as pure koiwi "a propitiatory rite" and pure rangi "a rite to cause rain to cease" indicate that this word shares some semantic components with Christian praying. That is why pure (and its cognates) has been generalized to mean prayer, praying in many Polynesian languages. Thus in Hawaiian pule refers not only to prayer and praying but also to church and combines with kahuna "priest, sorcerer" to create kahuna pule "minister, priest, preacher, pastor" (literally expert of praying).

Another key concept that may pose problems is that of soul. According to the Maori, the human being comprises, in addition to his or her body (tinana, cf. Hawaiian kino) three immaterial essences - wairua, mauri and hau. Wairua, the first of them, has a fairly extensive semantic spectrum reaching from a shadow, reflection, unsubstantial image, through spirit to soul. The latter is the divine element in mankind that leaves the human body

at death[5] and being immortal it travels to the underworld. It can leave the underworld only in the shape of a butterfly or a moth (metaphorically wairua atua "the soul of a god) or as ghosts (kehua). The second term, mauri may perhaps be characterized as life principle that does not leave the body during lifetime. Finally, there is hau, vital essence or power, not only of human beings, and it may be linked to the word hau meaning wind, breath. Both wairua and mauri have cognates in many Polynesian languages, cognates that occur within the same semantic field. It is wairua that has been chosen as the best approximation to the idea of Christian soul in Maori. The Hawaiians have given preference to the term'uhane defined as soul, spirit, ghost. No cognate of the word has been recorded in Maori.

Sacrifice or offering is an integral part of any religious system and its aim is to placate or propitiate God (gods). As Best[6] puts it, the fear of the anger of gods was the most powerful influence in the Maori society and offerings were presented to all gods. They were called whakaepa or whakahere "to conciliate by means of a present" and included cultivated food, fish, seaweed, birds or even, if only exceptionally, human beings (ika literally "fish"). In Maori, whakahere is frequently used to translate the concept of offering but patunga, patunga tapu is employed as an equivalent of sacrifice. The Hawaiian text of Bible likewise does not hesitate to use the traditional term mohai as an equivalent of Christian offering, sacrifice. These traditional terms were no doubt felt to be sufficiently similar to the Christian notion of offering in view of the nature of offerings mentioned in the Old Testament.

Conscience is a notion for which it is hard to find a precise equivalent in the Polynesian religion. The Maori translator has decided to choose the term hinengaro that has a more general meaning, approximately "the seat of thoughts and emotions, desire" of which conscience probably is a part while the Hawaiian Bible takes a recourse to lunamana'o, literally "officer of the mind", which may be regarded as an explanatory translation.

Covetousness is described in Maori as "activity of heaping up riches", i.e., mahi apo taonga and in Hawaiian puni waiwai "love of goods", puni kala "desirous of dollars", or alternatively, by means of hyperonym make'e "desirous to have".

The notion of will is reproduced in Maori as "what is pleasing (to someone)"; (tana) e pai (ai), obviously in accordance with the intention to distinguish it from desire, whereas no such attempt has been undertaken in Hawaiian where an approximation makemake "desire, want, wish" is used.

The notion of trusting in is described in Maori as a state in which "someone's thought, consideration in a person is firm", thus uu (toku)

5) Elsdon Best, *The Maori As He Was*, Wellington: R. E. Owen, The Zealand Government Printer 1952 (3rd Edition).
6) Elsdon Best, o.c.

whakaaro while in Hawaiian as "someone's thoughts about a person are clear": maopopo (ku'u) mana'o. It is easy to see that the Hawaiian version is too approximate if not imprecise.

Repentance is one of the key notions for which no plausible equivalent may be expected to exist in Polynesian ethic system. Therefore the Maoris have decided to adopt the English word repentance in the form ripeneta while the Hawaiians have again given preference to a more general and approximate term mihi "repent. apologize, regret, confess".

The notion of honour is felt to be one of those for which there is no suitable pendant in Maori and the translator has decided to borrow the English word honour (in Maori honore) while the less punctilious Hawaiian translator has contented himself with the hyperonym mahalo "gratitude, admiration, praise".

The related idea of reputation, of holding someone in reputation, is reproduced in Hawaiian upon a more general niveau as mana'o maika'i "think well of" whereas Maori again employs a loanword in the causative whakahonore.

The antonymic notion of dishonouring, dishonour has been translated by approximative means in both languages, cf. Maori whakaiti "diminish, debase, despise" and Hawaiian ho'ino "insult, abuse, dishonor".

It may be stated that the mechanism of semantic generalization is very frequently used in the process of translation. But the opposite process of semantic specification has also been observed to operate. For example, the notion of presence is reproduced in Maori and Hawaiian alike as a relative phrase with the personal pronoun (I, me) as the dominant term determined by the subordinate clause "be there": i oku wa i kona (Maori) literally "in my time there" or "be with you": ia'u i noho me 'oukou (Hawaiian).

Absence is analogously reproduced as the personal pronoun + "not to be there"; (inaianei) i ahau kahore i kona (Maori) "Now when I am not there" or as the pronoun + "dwell somewhere else": (i neia wa) e noho nei au i kahi 'e (Hawaiian) "This time when I am dwelling at another place".

The activity of preaching has found its correlate in the Maori term kauwhau with a slightly different meaning, i.e., "to recite, proclaim", very much like in the Hawaiian papa aku, cf. helu papa "to recite in consecutive order". The same procedure is employed repeatedly, as proved by the translation of the term respect whakapai kanohi "praising the face" in Maori and by mana'o (mai) "deem, consider" in Hawaiian.

Periphrastic translation was felt to be appropriate in the case of sacrilege, explicated as tahae i nga mea o nga temepara "steal things from temples" in Maori and as 'aihue i na mea la'a "steal sacred things" in Hawaiian. Secret is described, understandably enough, as mea ngaro "a lost, hidden thing" in Maori and as mea huna "a hidden thing" in Hawaiian. In many similar instances we have to do with a semantic decomposition or linearization of

the semantic components of the model word or perhaps with the attempt to conventionalize the most prototypical specimen (or action).

A comparison of Bible translation with other styles seems to indicate that the equivalents of abstractions are significantly more often sought either via paraphrasis or via approximation (semantic shift) than those of concrete terms referring to objects of Western provenience. For example, Witi Ihimaera's Maori version of the story The Card Game, i.e. He Kemu Kari[7] contains no more than a handful of periphrastic equivalents, i.e., miihini whakakaha reo "loudspeaker", atamira o te teihana "platform", takotoranga taonga "museum", hoou ... o eenei raa "modern", kapu mo nga taakaro "sports trophy", tangata purei kaari "card player". Among the relatively few instances of semantic shift one may quote taonga "asset", whakaahua "photograph", pouri "offended", whai atu "be interested", raruraru "busy". On the other hand, there are many more loanwords such as tereina "train", teihana "station", rori "road", kihi "kiss", moni "money", kuini "queen", taare "doll", ruuma "room", pire "pill", hohipera "hospital", nurse "neehi", kiihini "kitchen", wini "win".

While borrowing, if massive enough, can modify the phonemic system and phonotactics of the recipient language, it makes no noteworthy contribution to the semantic restructuration of the lexicon. The latter is much more affected by the methods of semantic modification of available lexical means and to a somewhat lesser extent by paraphrase. This is proved by the data from both Maori and Hawaiian.

REZUMÉ

Sémantické modifikácie polynézskeho lexika pod vplyvom kresťanského učenia

Cieľom článku je výskum interferencie dvoch vzdialených pojmových systémov, ktoré sa dostanú do vzájomného kontaktu. Tento kognitívny problém skúma autor na materiáli niekoľkých kľúčových pojmov kresťanského učenia po ich udomácnení v jazyku novozélandských Maoriov a v havajskom jazyku. Konfrontačný výskum sa opiera o porovnanie anglického textu Biblie s maorijským a havajským textom a poukazuje na možnosti riešenia konkrétnych prekladových problémov i na rozdiely medzi maorijskými a havajskými alternatívami, vyplývajúcimi aspoň čiastočne z rozdielnych prekladateľských prístupov.

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7) Witi Ihimaera, *Pounamu, Pounamu*, Auckland: Heinemann 1986: 1-6