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Alastair Pennycook
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The Modern Mission: The Language Effects of Christianity

Alastair Pennycook
University of Technology, Sydney

Sinfree Makoni
The Pennsylvania State University

Christian missionaries have played a crucial role not only in assisting past and current forms of colonialism and neocolonialism, not only in attacking and destroying other ways of being, but also in terms of the language effects their projects have engendered. The choices missionaries have made to use local or European languages have been far more than a mere choice of medium. On the one hand, missionary language projects continue to use and promote European languages, and particularly English, for Christian purposes. The use of English language teaching as a means to convert the unsuspecting English language learner raise profound moral and political questions about what is going on in English classrooms around the world. On the other hand, missionary linguists have played a particular role in the construction and invention of languages around the world. Of particular concern here are the ways in which language use, and understandings of language use, have been—and still are—profoundly affected by missionary projects. Bilingualism between indigenous languages and a metropolitan language, for example, was part of a conservative missionary agenda in which converting to Christianity was the inevitable process of being bilingual. The ongoing legacy of the language effects of Christianity is something that needs urgent attention.

Key words: Christianity, missionaries, language effects, bilingualism, invention, colonialism

That language and religion are profoundly linked is to state the obvious. The major religions, for example, revere certain texts (the Bible, Koran, Torah, and so on) and

much of religious activity is centered around interpreting the "word of God." It is then no coincidence that the Christian Gospel according to St. John starts with the famous line "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (King James Version, The Gospel According to St. John, 1–1). The relationship to particular languages, rather than language in general, however, is more complex. For some religions, the original language of the holy book is sacred: thus, classical Arabic for Muslims, Hebrew for Jews, Sanskrit for Buddhists. Christianity, however, has lost such a connection. While struggles still continue over the use of vernacular languages or Latin in parts of the Catholic church, and while the story of Babel (to which we shall return) still maintains an idea of an original language unsullied by human sin, the Christian church by and large does its work in whatever language(s) it prefers.

A crucial aspect of Christianity, then, is that it has distanced itself from an original language. While a number of languages, especially Greek and Latin, have held a particular status within the Christian church, the Reformation posited a direct line of communication between humans and God in vernacular languages, while the colonial missionary project made translation of the bible into as many languages as possible a Christian obligation. This has had immense implications for languages and Christianity: First, the injunction to operate in and on many languages has greatly facilitated the spread of Christianity: "While every day in the West, roughly 7500 people in effect stop being Christians, every day in Africa roughly double that number become Christians" (J. O. Mills cited in Isichei, 1995, p. 1).

> The expansion of Christianity in twentieth-century Africa has been so dramatic that it has been called the fourth great age of Christian expansion. According to much-quoted, if somewhat unreliable, statistics, there were 10 million African Christians in 1900, 143 million in 1970, and there will be 393 million in the year 2000. (Isichei, 1995, p. 1)

Second, the reciprocal relationship between colonial missionary work and the spread of major European languages—and in particular English in recent times—has further hastened the spread of such languages; and third, the use and creation of languages for Christian purposes has had vast effects on the world's languages, for Christianity has become indelibly bound up with linguistics, modernity, and literacy: The grammars designed for the local languages were invaluable tools in educating local peoples, these grammars and educations having profound reciprocal effects.

In the context of Christian missionary work and language use, we can discern two main traditions. The first draws a strong connection between particular languages and the Christian mission, urging the learning of European languages as indelibly linked with the Christian message. Of particular concern have been the growing implications of a global language such as English becoming linked not only to Euro-

pean missionary beliefs of moral improvement and social development, but also to the pragmatic project of reaching as many "nonbelievers" as possible, especially because the teaching of English has become a lure to bring nonbelievers into missionary clutches. The second tradition, the missionary-linguist project, has been concerned predominantly with the spread of Christianity through whatever languages were available. And in order to make languages available, this work spawned an industry of linguistic description (or invention) and bible translation. Missionaries, colonizers, and other European administrators explicitly linked the grammars and dictionaries they produced to the goals of "improving" African languages and cultivating African morality (Irvine, 1993, p. 32).

The formalization of the indigenous languages into Christian languages was not only significant linguistically, but played a key role in the formation of social classes as Errington comments:

Missionary work that effaced pre-colonial, social formations also gave rise to new language-linked socio-economic stratification that subserved political and economic agendas of colonial states that sanctioned their work. The new languages were spoken first by converts who were members of literate proto-bourgeoisie, salariats, or literate colonized compradoes. (Errington, 2001, p. 25)

In Madagascar the production of a dictionary and bible translation by the protestant London missionary society consolidated the national significance of an elite local dialect (Spolsky, 2003, p. 87).

The concerns about the missionary English project have finally received some critical attention (Edge, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). The use of English language teaching as a means to convert the unsuspecting English language learner raises profound moral and political questions about what is going on in English classrooms around the world. We shall discuss these briefly in the next section. Our concern in this article, however, is only secondarily to do with the ethics of missionary work and language use. We are primarily concerned here with a different question, namely the effect of the use of non-European languages for missionary work. Our interest here, furthermore, is not so much on the effect of the missionary work on the lives and beliefs of people but rather on the languages themselves. As numerous examples have shown, many cultures around the world have been robust enough to resist or appropriate the Christian onslaught, with many local religions in South America, Asia, and Africa (Isichei, 1995) absorbing and appropriating aspects of Christianity. It is our contention, however, that the vernacular missionary project, with its interests in creating, developing, inventing, and maintaining languages through which it can promote Christianity has had an immense effect on the use and understanding of languages across the world. It is ultimately, to paraphrase Foucault (1980), the "language effects" of missionary work that need to be understood.

MAKING ENGLISH THE LANGUAGE OF
GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

The tradition which ties Christianity to English has its origins in colonial educa-
tion, though its more recent development is a result of changing global configu-
rations. While the agenda to use missionary creations of local languages to de-
liver the Christian message to local people was significant, other colonial
educators saw a more profound link between Christianity and English. As
Viswanathan (1989) argues, the general tendency of the colonial administration
to avoid religious instruction in order not to offend the colonized peoples led to a
search for another means by which the laws of social order and morality could
be inculcated. This medium, she argues, was English literature. Indeed,
Viswanathan suggests that "the discipline of English came into its own in the
age of colonialism" (p. 2), and the development of English literature in India in
fact served as a trial run in social and political control before it was taken up in
England. It would seem, however, that not only was it English literature that was
seen as this embodiment of Christian thought, but also the language itself. In-
deed, for some 19th century writers, English and Christianity were indelibly
linked. According to Read (1849, p. 48, cited in Bailey, 1991, p. 116) not only
was English "the language of the arts and sciences, of trade and commerce, of
civilization and religious liberty" but it was also "a store-house of the varied
knowledge which brings a nation within the pale of civilization and Christianity
… Already it is the language of the Bible." In 1792, Charles Grant had also
stressed the learning of English in his evangelical project: "The use and under-
standing of the English language would enable the Hindus to reason, and to ob-
tain new and better views of their duty as rational and Christian creatures"
(Clive, 1973, p. 345).

Indeed, many of those who were consumed by Anglicist zeal were also men of
the church. The Reverend James George (1867) started his lecture on the mission
of Great Britain to the world by suggesting that it is God's will that certain nations
should rise up and spread at certain points in history; the time had now come for
Great Britain to sit "as a mighty teacher—and while she sits in her matchless pow-
ers of political supremacy, commerce, wealth and literature —these influences will
combine to diffuse the language, with all the excellences kindred to it throughout
the whole world" (p. 8). Thus, he suggested, the nation had been "commissioned to
teach a noble language embodying the richest scientific and literary treasures" (p.
4). Not only was the spread of English the will of God, however; it was also a
means of rectifying the sins visited on humans after Babel. Thus, the punishment
of speaking in many tongues, George argues, could be assuaged when "our English
speech shall become the universal speech of all men" (p. 7). Thus the messianic
spread of English could be seen both as a chosen act of God so that the "rich
freightage with which this Argosy is so majestically sailing down the stream of

time" (p. 7) could be borne to all people, and as a means of combating the evils the Lord had brought on humans after the building of the Tower of Babel.

Beyond such crude, expansionist missionary discourses and practices, English was also spread in more subtle ways. It was used as a template for the analysis of other languages, foisting English metalanguage on African languages. The use of English metalanguage to describe African languages is significant because unlike other objects, language is in a large measure a product of the metalanguage used in its description. In African colonial contexts and indeed even in most postcolonial contexts, this means that most Africans still experience their "languages" in an alien format (Irvine, 1993). The use of an English metalanguage for non-European languages is indicative of a general epistemology in which local knowledge is only usable when it is framed in an alien format. In African contexts this is symptomatic of "extroversion"—a tendency to produce knowledge for external communities (Hountondji, 1995, p. 3).

With the massive increase in the global demand for English, the language has now become the bait for the missionary hook. While this was also true to some extent in earlier colonial times—missionary schools teaching in English appealed to middle class parents, as they still do in many parts of the world—it is a more recent configuration between the global demand for English and a new brand of Christian evangelical activity that now confronts the world (see Pennycook & Coutand Marin, 2003). Whereas in the next section we will discuss connections between missionaries, linguists and the description of languages as conduits for conversion, here we see missionary applied linguistics developing the global English language teaching (ELT) project as both a means and an end of the broader Christian project. Thus, for example, the Mission Finder.org (2002) Web site offers "Christian Missionary Opportunities to Teach English as a Second Language" and provides connections to a wide range of other Christian ELT organizations.

According to Tennant (2002), the "Christian TESOL behemoths" (those groups with the greatest number of teaching opportunities) are as follows: English Language Institute/China, "which sent 500 English teachers this summer and around 400 for school-year-long teaching stints"; the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, "which has over 500 people teaching English around the world"; and Education Services International, "which has between 150 and 200 English teachers in its year-long program and 100 in its summer program." Describing the "bluntly named Evangelistic English Language Camps" run by International Messengers (IM), Tennant testifies to the success of such organizations: "at least 10 of my friends became Christians. At the eight camps that I attended, I witnessed about 50 conversions. Each camp yields between two and seven converts. Between 20 and 25 express the desire to be involved in a Bible study. All are followed up by local churches and IM staff."

It is interesting to note that these organizations are both ubiquitous and candid about their operations. English teaching is being used all over the world as "part of

a church planting effort," and "to teach English to missionary candidates." Although the names of these organizations do not in many cases transparently announce their missionary goals, the Web sites are generally open and clear about their preparedness to use ELT for missionary purposes. One organization presents its program:

> By recognizing the escalating demand for knowledge of the English language, the staff at Christian Outreach International has discovered a gold mine rich with mission opportunity (…) as your students come to trust you as their English instructor, the door is open for sharing your faith and the Gospel. Each semester many lost souls come to know the Lord. (Christian Outreach International, 2002)

For Christian Outreach International there appears to be no concern about viewing the increased demand for English as "a gold mine rich with mission opportunity." Nor does the question of gaining students' trust in order to preach the gospel appear to raise ethical questions about this pedagogy. According to missionaries' testimonies, English classes are the most efficient way to attract people. Indeed, for some organizations, using ELT has become an identifiable "approach" to missionary work. As Woodward attests in his article on "Teaching English As a Tool of Evangelicism" in Germany,

> We can attest … that we came into contact with more unbelievers with these English classes than we ever did with any other method. We did adult education seminars, gospel meetings, children's works, choruses, Bible correspondence courses, and camps. God blessed them all, but nothing appealed to the "typical" German better than the English classes which we offered. (Woodward, 1993, p. 2)

Tennant (2002) supports this view: "Start an evangelical church in Poland, and no one will come. Start an English school, and you'll make many friends." Another organization, Vision International Alliance, explains the importance of Teaching English Abroad in these terms:

> English teachers are a double-edged sword in the mission field because of their great demand and their mobility. The demand is strong worldwide for native English speakers to teach nationals and many students are eager to befriend their American teachers. The demand also enables English teachers to enter countries that would otherwise be closed to Christians, interact intimately with the locals and witness Christ's grace and love through lifestyle evangelism. (Vision International Alliance, 2002)

A number of countries do not grant missionary visas, in which case missionaries apply for "aid visas," under the title of English teachers. As Rick Love, the international director of Frontiers, the largest Christian group in the world that focuses ex-

clusively on proselytising to Muslims as part of a "stealth crusade" (Yeoman, 2002) against Islam (the Web site strikingly announces "Why we love Muslims"), explains, in order to work as a missionary in Muslim countries it is often necessary to hide one's identity. Evangelists should always have a handy, nonreligious explanation for their presence in Muslim countries, he explains. Before going to Indonesia, he had qualified as an English teacher: "I could look someone in the eye and say, 'I am an English teacher, I have a degree, and I'm here to teach'" (cited in Yeoman, 2002). As he goes on to explain, once you've developed trust, then it's time to gain new believers.

A slightly different perspective has been put forward by some missionary English teachers who are circumspect about these overt evangelical approaches. Snow (2001) argues that by showing themselves to be willing to learn other languages and cultures ("learning as witness"), by teaching well and conducting themselves as good Christians ("teaching as witness"), by helping students and working with compassion ("teaching as ministry"), and by teaching English in order to help people meet their needs ("teaching as service"), Christian English teachers can show the love of God through their work as English teachers. He concludes,

> For Christians in mission, English teaching can and should be much more than an opportunity to gain access to closed nations for evangelistic purposes, or a form of social work only incidentally carried out by Christians. It can be an opportunity to bear witness, to minister, to serve the disadvantaged, to contribute toward peace between people of different cultures, and even to build better relations between different branches of the church universal. Looked at in these ways, English teaching can be more than a secular job that serves as a means to other ends—English teaching itself becomes a form of Christian mission. (pp. 176–177)

A number of possible reactions to Christian activity in English classes present themselves. First, obviously for some, it is righteous activity that should be supported: The Christian message is a true message and the more souls that can be saved, by fair means or foul, the better. This position, outlined above, we call the Christian evangelical position. Second, for other Christians, while the mission remains the same, the ethical concerns over fair or foul means of conversion become significant, leading to an emphasis on service over proselytizing (see Snow, 2001), or what we can call the Christian service position. Third, the role that both of these missionary positions play in promoting the spread of English may lead some, who are not so fervently Christian but who nevertheless see widespread English use as beneficial to the world, to view such work in a favourable light. This we would call an English beneficence position. Fourth, the lack of debate about these concerns suggests that many educators either do not see this as a legitimate topic for discussion—the cultural and ideological content of English language classrooms is not a

concern for the English language teaching profession—or it is simply undecidable, since one set of ideological presuppositions is as good as any other. Thus Widdowson (2001) asks,

> Whose ethics are we talking about? Whose morals? And how can you tell a worthy cause from an unworthy one? Critical people, like missionaries, seem to be fairly confident that they have identified what is good for other people on the basis of their own beliefs. But by making a virtue of the necessity of partiality we in effect deny plurality and impose our own version of reality, thereby exercising the power of authority which we claim to deplore. (p. 15)

This we call the liberal agnostic position.

Fifth, for some, any work that serves to promote English, particularly when this is at the expense of other languages and cultural systems, is inherently part of the process of inequitable global restructuring. This, following Phillipson (1992), we call the linguistic imperialist position. Sixth, also viewing such work within the large framework of global relations, concerned educationalists such as Edge (2003) take issue centrally with the moral implications of a lack of transparency: "If such transparency is to be ruled out for tactical reasons, and the argument is that the end (saving souls) justifies the means (deception and manipulation), then I am simply bewildered, and finally repelled, by the morality of the stance being taken" (p. 705). This we call the secular humanist position. Finally, for other educators, classrooms are inevitably cultural and political sites, with teachers always promoting covert or overt cultural and ideological agendas. The dilemma, therefore, for this position is how to justify ethically and politically a particular critical agenda over others. This we call the critical pedagogical position. Unless we can start to engage in a debate over these concerns, to start to discuss the various moral projects tied up with ELT, we will be left with a critical left that believes in its own political rectitude, a religious right that believes in its god-given agenda, and a large liberal middle that erroneously believes that all of this can be kept out of the classroom.

The issue that we wish to draw particular attention to here, however, has to do with ways in which language use, and understandings of language use, have been profoundly affected by such missionary projects. It is certainly the case that while promoting English, missionaries may also have supported bilingualism, yet the bilingualism which Christianity encouraged was between "indigenous" languages and a metropolitan language, and not between indigenous languages themselves. Bilingualism between indigenous languages and a metropolitan language was therefore part of a conservative missionary agenda in which converting to Christianity was the inevitable process of being bilingual. The crucial issue is to what extent the conservative Christian agenda has been continued even in policies which on the surface are ostensibly liberal or even radical. Current scholarship in bilingualism, particularly

in Africa but also elsewhere, can be said to be heir to this Christian view of bilingualism: Because a majority of studies focus on the Christian type of bilingualism—indigenous and metropolitan languages—rarely are there studies into bilingualism of indigenous languages only, although the latter is much more widespread than the former (see Makoni & Meinhof, 2004). It is this type of Christian bilingualism which is reinforced even in programs whose goal is additive bilingualism.

In addition, it is crucial to see here how the Christian English missionary project is *embedded* (to use some current terminology) within broader cultural and political formations. Amid the debates about what cultural and ideological messages English may carry, the mistake is to look for some prior essence of culture that is borne by the language. Rather, what we need to understand is that it is the performance of English in contexts of use as a Christian language that embed cultural meanings in the language, and that these Christian messages are deeply linked with other ideological formations. If on the one hand, then, these missionary methods of gaining trust raise serious ethical concerns, so too do the ideologies that often accompany the conservative evangelical Christian theologies. Of course, missionary work has long been complicit with larger political and economic goals, but the recent shift in global relations, with the rampant ascendancy of an aggressively conservative, capitalist and Christian United States (supported particularly by Anglophone allies in wars against Islamic states), alongside the ever-increasing global clamour for English and its changing role in the world, has led to a new and troubling set of relations between English language teaching and Christian missionary activity. Thus, English is widely promoted as a modern, Christian and democratic language that can counter the despotisms of alternative worldviews. English has become a weapon in the current global wars.

MAKING LANGUAGES SERVE MISSIONARY PURPOSES

Turning to the use of languages other than English, it is worth noting that for some missionaries, and especially those who became involved in colonial administration, the relationship between religion and the language of instruction was seen in pragmatic terms. Thus it did not matter what language was used or even what religion: The crucial point was to deliver a sound moral education that would render a compliant work force that accepted colonial rule, obeyed the law and participated in colonial capitalism. An interesting example of this view was Eitel, a German missionary, a "sound orientalist and sinologist" (Lethbridge, 1895/1983, p. vii), and Inspector of Schools in Hong Kong from 1879 to 1897. Eitel's central concern was that education should give students sufficient grounding in morality. Indeed, although he clearly supported the teaching of English, he also argued that students in the village schools were getting a better education than those receiving a secular education in English. By studying Chinese classics, students learn "a system of

morality, not merely a doctrine, but a living system of ethics." Thus they learn "filial piety, respect for the aged, respect for authority, respect for the moral law." In the Government schools, by contrast, where English books are taught from which religious education is excluded, "no morality is implanted in the boys" (Education Commission Report, 1883, p. 70). Thus, the teaching of Chinese is "of higher advantage to the Government" and "boys strongly imbued with European civilization whilst cut away from the restraining influence of Confucian ethics lose the benefits of education, and the practical experience of Hong Kong is that those who are thoroughly imbued with the foreign spirit, are bad in morals" (p.70).

Eitel's position—promoting the teaching of Chinese and Confucianism as a means to develop moral and political obedience—was a result of the proscription of religious education in state schools, which, as discussed above, also led to the development of a particular canon of English literature and a particular view of English. Most missionaries, however, operated outside the state system and thus were free to promote Christianity in local languages. In order to do so, however, they needed not only to learn local languages, but to convert local languages into Christian texts "fenced" with examinations. In some cases, missionaries went to extreme lengths, not merely changing languages for their own ends but "inventing" new languages for religious purposes, as happened in various Pacific island contexts (Mühlhäusler, 1996). The process had a profound effect on language ecologies in many parts of the world, some intentional, others not. Rather than simply accepting the new ecologies passively, colonial subjects developed new genres of verbally mocking power. For example, Julius Torend, a Jesuit missionary in southern Africa in the late 1880s, described in his memoirs an exchange between himself and a "poor old kaffir woman." Torrend gave the woman a loaf of bread receiving in return the following expression of thanks: "*Nkosi! Dade! Mta Ka Tixo! Mta ka Rulemente! Solotomana* (That is Lord!, Father! Child of God! Child of the Government!" (Worger, 2001, p. 417).

Colonial authorities and missionaries, as Errington (2001) points out,

> Shared a territorial logic that was similarly inscribed in colonial linguistic work, presupposing mappings of monolithic languages onto demarcated boundaries. … Within these bounded confines were conceived to be ethnolinguistically homogeneous groups that were localized, and naturalized, as "tribes" or "ethnicities." (p. 24)

What these missionary-linguists were involved in, then, was not only an attempt to convert disbelievers to Christianity, but also to produce what they saw as order in the chaos of languages that surrounded them. They saw in the "primitive tribes" that they discovered not complex multilingual societies but pure, Edenic monolingual groups: "Primevalness and purity were convergent, overdetermined aspects of missionary language ideologies. The perceived primitivity of the communities they encountered resonated in the first place with Biblical narratives of (monolin-

gual) Eden, and the theology of dispersal from (multilingual) Babel." (Errington, 2001, p. 27).

This missionary work, then, was to have a massive effect on the socio-genesis of languages, nowhere more so than in Africa. The socio-genesis of African languages is intricately linked to colonialism and missionary projects. This is not to say of course that prior to colonialism and Christianity there were no African languages but that some versions of African languages have their roots in Christianity and literacy, the local population distinguishing between the "new" African languages which were the products of missionary and colonial intervention and the versions of African languages they spoke. For example, a variety of kikongo spoken in the Democratic republic of the Congo was referred to as *kikongo ya leta*—the kikongo of the state—or at times *kikongo ya bula matari*—the kikongo of the stone breaker (Mufwene, 2001, 176). Other languages such as Lingala, Ciluba were not described as *Ciluba ya leta,* or *Lingala ya leta.* Diansonsiasa (1985) quoted in Yanga (1998, p. 176) attributes the naming to three factors:

1. The Kongo people do not perceive this variety as their language.
2. They look at it as a "different language from kikongo."
3. They consider it as a "new language created by foreigners for foreigners, and that will disappear with foreigners."

The process of creating foreign indigenous languages was widespread. Harries (1987) demonstrates that missionary linguists forged Tsonga, Ronga, and other languages out of diverse speech varieties. The process was not restricted to central and southern Africa. The most illustrious example in west Africa is Yoruba. Yoruba was codified into a single language by missionary linguists and the name was "nothing short of pure Greek to no less than 99% of the people now called Yoruba." (Irvine, 1993, p. 28). Elsewhere, *Korekore* and *Zezuru* were chiShona nicknames for northerners and highlanders but were to be subsequently used as ethnic and linguistic labels (Chimhundu, 1992). In southern Africa, efforts to preserve "languages" therefore need to take into serious consideration the socio-historical contexts in which some of these foreign indigenous languages emerged (see Cook, 2001; Makoni & Brutt-Griffler, in press).

One of the long-lasting effects of missionary linguistics was the unfortunate tendency to confuse African languages with linguistic codes. It is in this sense we can say that prior to Christianity and colonialism Africa was a language-free zone.[1] The "old" missionaries and their recent counterparts the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) share one important feature in common. They were interested in ultimately converting "local" Africans to adopt a Europeanised worldview, for both religious purposes and for more practical reasons such as small scale farming so that they could shift away from waged labour. The construction of African languages was therefore of central importance if European worldviews were to be

clearly articulated to Africans. The missionaries and the colonial administrators were aiming at producing core groups of African assistants to spread the word and encourage Africans to adopt European modes of farming. For the conversion to be successful, and for the conversion to have long term effects it was necessary for both the "old" missionaries and their contemporary counterparts under the guise of the Summer Institute of Linguistics to articulate their worldviews in a medium which would achieve maximum effect: indigenous languages.

In many cases local people were able to distinguish between the alien indigenous languages and the versions of their own languages which they used to communicate amongst each other (see Makoni & Meinhof, 2004; Mufwene, 2004). The attempts to superimpose alien ways of thinking through indigenous languages were not totally successful, either politically or linguistically. Politically, the imposition of alien ways of thinking through indigenous languages was meant to create a politically compliant populace. The process was partially successful in so far as it contributed to the creation of a class which actively thought white, a phenomenon which Frantz Fanon (1967) described in detail in *Black Skin White Masks,* a phenomenon not restricted only to Algeria but much more widespread. The project of imposing alien ways of thinking through vernaculars was not totally successful because it did not pre-empt demands for political emancipation. Indeed the absence of a meaningful communication between the colonisers and Africans may have quickened and not slowed down the demands for political liberation because the formalised indigenous languages were designed to talk at and not with the Africans. The dependence of colonialism on the institutions (including languages) which they had invented often paradoxically limited colonial power rather than facilitated it.

From a religious perspective the indigenous languages created a considerable amount of indeterminacy in how Africans conceptualized Christian concepts. There was no consensus among the missionaries on how Christian notions such as God, sin and other religious terminology should be translated, creating the possibility that the "same" Christian concepts "sin," "god," "holy spirit" not only have different meanings between languages but at times are the source of acute controversy even within the same language. For example, God in southern Africa had multiple meanings: *Wedenga* derived from *Kudenga* (in the sky). Unfortunately the focus on God as sky-bound excluded the possibilities of a God of the caves/rocks. Another frequently used term was *Mudzimu* which was found to be problematic because it conflated a European God with African ancestral spirits. Roman Catholics favoured *Yave,* a transliteration of *Yahweh* (Jeater & Hove, 2004). The problem of "parsing God" was not restricted to chiShona but was also clearly an important issue in South Africa, for example among the Zulu. A number of different names were proposed to name God: *uthixo, modimo,* and *unkulunkulu* (meaning *all powerful,* or merely *old*) (Worger, 2001, p. 417). The missionaries' desire to have a name for God was not only religious; it was motivated by a desire to create conditions which would enable the colonial administrators to enforce the

law. It was driven by a desire to have a phrase by which Africans could swear to tell the truth and they could be held accountable for the veracity of their truth in courts of law (Worger, 2001). In spite of the importance attached to parsing God, the naming was not easily resolved because for example, it was still a source of controversy whether *uThixo* referred to a creator allied to colonialism or still retained its vernacular meanings of devil and insect worship! (Worger, 2001, p. 428).

Literacy was introduced in Uganda by Christian missionaries in the late 19th century. The missionaries felt that in order to make the local Africans understand Christianity, they had to be taught in the Africans' "own" languages, which historically turned out to be European versions of African languages. Pamphlets were produced to teach Christianity, and as Christianity spread, so did reading and writing.

> The missionaries who played a dominant role in the educational production of such local manpower knew, largely from previous experience elsewhere, that although English was to play a key role in the production of the educated elite, not much headway could be made in the evangelization process of the local population without recourse to the languages most widely understood and used by such populations (Kalema, 2001, p. 13).

So the translation of the bible into Luganda was undertaken and a start was made in establishing literacy and basic education for the local population, mainly for evangelization purposes. Literacy served the colonizing power as well, because the colonizing powers had to keep official records. Orthographies produced after two conferences in 1945 and 1946 in Uganda have generally served the Bantu languages well. A majority of them are accepted by the local linguists and users of those languages. In some cases two or more different orthographies have developed for different varieties of the same "language." Two different orthographies have evolved and are officially recognized for the language which has come to be called Runyakitara (Ladefoged, Glick, & Criper, 1971). Although there might be different orthrographies, these do not produce communicational barriers between users of the different orthographies.

Lwo, Lugbara, and Ateso/Akarimojong have no standard orthographies acceptable to all users of those languages. Different missionaries have used different orthographies. The construction of the different orthographies is consistent with the general ideological context within which Christianity was spreading. The construction of these orthographies was taking place concurrently with the "invention" of other structures which are now typically thought as authentically African, ethnicity, customary law, and so on (see Ranger, 1983). The process of construction of orthographies and other social structures was not restricted to Africa, also occurring in other parts of colonial world, notably in India (Cohn, 1996). The construction of orthographies and the formation of European versions of African languages need to be seen as part of a cornerstone of European governance and sur-

veillance of the world. This should not be construed to say that Africans were not involved in the construction of languages, and other traditional structures. They contributed typically by providing the necessary "data" on which the languages were subsequently designed, but the systematisation was left to the missionaries.

There are two very important implications of this: First, these missionary projects are deeply connected not only to the socio-genesis of languages but also to the genesis of linguistics; and second, this work has had massive effects on the use, naming and construction of languages around the world. Linguistic description/invention and Christian proselytizing went hand in hand, affecting not only the languages of nonbelievers but also the discipline that grew out of these practices: linguistics. Kenneth Pike, author of *Phonemics* (1947) is cited as describing phonemics as "a control system blessed in God to preserve tribes from chaos" (cited in Hvalkof & Aaby, 1981, p. 37; in Errington, 2001). Pike himself was, like many other linguists, a member of the SIL, and thus, as Errington (2001) suggests, can be viewed as a "postcolonial successor to colonial-era missionizing linguists" (p. 21). The process of translating the bible into local languages is not only being carried out by the old linguist-missionary societies such as SIL and Wycliffe International, but also by more recent missionary organizations, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is actively involved in translating some of its own texts, such as the Book of Mormon, into local languages across the globe. Thus, there is also continuity between the work of the colonial missionaries and the new missionaries. There are, then, clear and continuous links between the linguistic projects of colonial missionaries and the continued work of the SIL and other missionary organizations, and between missionary linguistic work and current linguistic work, trapped as it all too often is in a preservationist view of local languages, languages that can only be discerned by the objective eye of the professional linguist.

As with the missionary English project, bible translation projects are carrying on as never before. As Wycliffe International (2003; formerly Wycliffe Bible Translation), which has long "continued to use the languages of native people to campaign against their religious traditions" (Stoll, 1982, p. 2), explains its mission:

> By the year 2025, together with partners worldwide, we aim to see a Bible translation program begun in all the remaining languages that need one. Wycliffe International's work is to facilitate the translation of God's Word into every language that needs it. Wycliffe has organizations in nearly forty countries and has had a part in translating over 500 New Testaments into minority and indigenous languages. Fifteen hundred more translation projects representing over 70 countries, are in progress. … Three hundred eighty million people in over 3,000 language groups still wait for the Good News in their own languages. They have waited long enough!

Apart from the extraordinary presumption behind the notion of languages that "need" a bible translation, of crucial interest are the profound effects that these projects are having on languages themselves.

A recent report (Nagai & Lister, 2003) of an SIL project in Papua New Guinea (PNG) sheds some light on current work. The goals of this project focus on "reconstructing the Maiwala culture" and "reversing the language-mixing situation" (p. 89). In order to do this, "we came up with the idea of translating the Lord's Prayer into Maiwala" with the help of a colleague, who has just begun the "Maiwala Bible Translation Project because of his concern about the situation of the heavy borrowing of English words" (p. 95). While there may indeed be some commendable achievements here in working with members of the community to reconstruct more traditional linguistic and cultural ways of being, it is surely disingenuous to combat the interest in cricket and code-mixing by translating the bible and the lord's prayer into Maiwala: "Although most of the community members come to the cricket ground on Saturday, only 10% of them attend the Sunday morning church service" lament Nagai and Lister (2003, p. 90). The combination of Christianity, church-going, bible translation, and language maintenance needs to be seen in more complex relation to its apparent foes, cricket, modernity, and code-mixing. Somewhat warily it seems, given the deeply problematic history of SIL activity, Skutnabb-Kangas (2003) gives her blessing to this work. Thus, the missionary zeal to "maintain" Maiwala wins out over concerns about the inscription of Maiwala language and culture into a missionary project.

Christian missionary language and literacy projects in PNG have a long history. Missionaries first arrived in the late 19th century, and since that time have had immense effects on language and education in the region, some promoting English, others pushing for greater use of regional lingua francas, notably Hiri Motu and Tok Pisin, while many others worked directly in the local languages (see Smith, 1987). According to Kulick and Stroud (1993), literacy in the Pacific region was introduced by missionaries and was almost entirely for Christian purposes: "When villagers learned to read, they did so in order to be able to read Christian literature" (p. 35). In more recent times, they explain, "the missionary-linguists" of SIL and Wycliffe justify their continued existence in PNG by "de-emphasising their evangelistic goals and by accentuating instead the role they play in furthering vernacular literacy" (p. 30). As Mühlhäusler (1996), however, argues, the benefits of such vernacular literacy are by no means clear; indeed, there is ample evidence of the detrimental effects of the development of literacy on language ecologies. Of central importance here is the concern that the work done on and through languages in the name of literacy fundamentally changes the nature and use of those languages. Of course, as Kulick and Stroud (1993) argue, this is not to say that communities do not change and appropriate literacy and Christianity to different ends from those originally intended. But the point here is not just that literacy is used as a means to convert people to Christianity, but that in the process of these literacy and language projects, languages and literacy

practices are brought into existence as Christian languages and literacy practices, moulded along Western lines. The so-called preservation, maintenance or reconstruction of vernacular languages is therefore always a construction of a particular type, a consolidation of a specific view of the world. The introduction of literacy altered the orientations to "truth." For example, Masangara (1997) demonstrates how the introduction of literacy altered the orientations towards truth and oath taking by speakers of Kirundi-Kinyarwanda in Central Africa.

Looking at the introduction of literacy into the Kaluli community in PNG by Australian missionaries, Schieffelin (2000) notes how this "challenged and changed Kaluli notions of truth, knowledge, and authority, thereby affecting Kaluli linguistic as well as social structures" (p. 294). Schieffelin argues that "everyday language practices, local metalinguistics, and language ideologies that are embedded in complex cultural and historical moments intersect in ongoing processes of social reproduction and rapid cultural change" (p. 296). Thus, from the initial grammar of Kaluli, in which Christian and Western practices "were simply slipped into the linguistic materials and treated as if they had always been there," so that it was impossible to distinguish between Kaluli ways of saying things and "what an Australian missionary linguist thought were good sentences illustrating linguistic structures" (p. 302), to literacy practices, which emphasized, in true Christian fashion, reading over writing, and truth as inherent in the text itself, the colonial missionary work on and through Kaluli was aimed at "domination, control, and conversion to a particular point of view" (p. 321) and wrought profound changes on the social, cultural and linguistic practices of the Kaluli. As Schieffelin suggests, "every language choice is a social choice that has critical links to the active construction of culture" (p. 323).

CONCLUSION: THE LANGUAGE EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANITY

Although missionary projects in themselves are worthy of extensive critical examination for their deep and long term complicity with colonialism, neoliberalism, and capital exploitation, it is the connections between language use and religion that we are drawing attention to here. The choices missionaries have made to use local or European languages have been far more than a mere choice of medium. Indeed the whole notion of languages as media of communication is misguided, based as it is on a Lockean idea of communication as "telementation" in which communication is construed as consisting of a transference of messages from one mind to another (Cameron, 1997, p. 55; Harris, 1981; Makoni & Meinhof, 2004). Languages do not preexist their use as if they were objects in the world. Rather, they are brought into being by the particular uses to which they are put. Thus missionary language projects on the one hand continue to promote and create English as a language with a particu-

lar role in the contemporary world, and on the other hand have played a significant role in the construction and invention of languages around the world. The legacy of missionary linguists is a world in which a particular view and use of language has been promoted under the guise of Christian proselytizing. Thus, Christian missionaries have played crucial roles not only in assisting past and current forms of colonialism and neocolonialism, not only in attacking and destroying other ways of being, but also in the language effects their projects have engendered.

ENDNOTE

[1]This comment relates to Heryanto's (1995) observation that prior to the development of Bahasa Indonesia, Java was a language free zone. This obviously does not imply that the people of Java did not use languages, but rather that what was meant by language was something fundamentally different.

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