

BICKNELL'S TRANSLATION OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL INTO MARQUESAN*

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Alongside the Catholic R. P. Pierre Gérard Chaulet, the Protestant James Bicknell was one of the first translators who have undertaken to introduce Bible to the Marquesans, namely St. John's Gospel, one of the more abstract Biblical texts and had to solve a variety of problems resulting from this exacting task.

A direct comparison with Chaulet is hardly possible because the latter's *Histoire Sainte* includes the New Testament only as one part of his abridged version of the whole Bible and in addition to this, St. John's gospel is quite different in style and content from the other three gospels. A considerable cultural distance between the translation source and its target forced the translator to employ a variety of creative partial solutions which can be grouped into three classes, just as expected after the experience with Chaulet's translation (Krupa 2000: 148–153).

The highest degree of cultural gap is spanned by means of borrowing – used in those instances for which there are no equivalent referents in the target language. It is often the case of animals, as with the following words: *ateni* “ass”, *hipa* “sheep”, plants as *poteto* “wheat” (meaning also “bread”), *fiku* “fig” or food and other phenomena, such as *mane* “manna”, *galani* “gallon”, ancient measures *setadia* “stadia” or abstractions: *aua* “hour”, *mare* “wedding”, *haneri* “hundred”, *tausani* “thousand”, ethnonyms *Iudaio* “Jew”, *Helene* “Greek”, *(a)tavini* “servant”, and religious phenomena *logou* “word”, *tiaporo* “devil”, *anela* written also as *anera* “angel”, *Sabati* “Sabbath”, *daimonio* “possessed by the devil”, *Messia* “Messiah” (in Chaulet: *Metia*), *papetito* “to baptize” (in Chaulet: *papatema*), *perofeta* “prophet” (alongside with the genuine Marquesan *tau'a*). In some instances the translator's decision for a loanword was obviously motivated by his intention to keep apart seemingly similar but in truth very different conceptions.

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Some of them have been borrowed from French, cf. *pate* "vessel, receptacle"; however, English words occur more frequently and seem to be of an older date: *hipa* "sheep", *aua* "hour", *tavini* "servant", *haneri* "hundred", *tausani* "thousand", *potato* "bread"; other loanwords are either from Greek (*logou*, *anel*, *daimonio*, *Helene*, *Judaia*, *papetito*, *stadia*) or Latin (*ateni* "ass") and Hebrew (*Sabati* "Sabbath") – directly or through mediation of French or English.

Paraphrasing or compounding has the advantage of being semantically transparent even if the transparency does not amount to an unambiguous correlation; the meaning of the whole is only a more or less approximate sum of the meanings of its parts. Examples are: *huevai* "cask", from *hue* "calebas" + *vai* "water, liquid" (lit. gourd for water), *hana mana* "miracle" from *hana* "doing, working" + *mana* "power, prestige", a series of compounds the head of which is *fa'e* "house", for example *fa'e pu'e* "church" (*fa'e* "house" + *pu'e* "prayer"), *fa'e tapu* "temple" (*fa'e* "house" + *tapu* "sacred, taboo"), *fa'e uma'u* "tent" (*fa'e* "house" + *uma'u* "umbrella"), *fa'e pa'apa'a* "prison" (*fa'e* "house" + *pa'apa'a* "closed with a key"), *fa'e hakaote'ao* "synagogue" (*fa'e* "house" + *haka'o tekao* "teaching to speak"). In addition to them there are phrases with verbal heads and direct objects, e.g. *tia'ihipa* "shepherd" = *tia'i* "to guard" + *hipa* "sheep", further verbal heads followed by attributive determiners such as *fanau haka'ua* "to be reborn" = *fanau* "to be born" + *haka'ua* "again", *tekao mavivovivo* "to speak in parables" = *tekao* "to speak" + *mavivovivo* "difficult to understand", *moe keu* "to commit adultery" = *moe* "to sleep" + *keu* "to play".

The above mentioned examples tend to become compounds.

The most interesting class of solutions are represented by semantic shifts motivated so to say from inside.

Semantic shifts are very common independently of whether the language is exposed to an external impact or not. Often they are easier to notice in collocations with other words. Thus the original Marquesan word *aoma'ama* consists of *ao* "rule, day/time/, cloud" and *ma'ama* "light" and the word as a whole refers to the "world" as the realm of light. This motivation is universal rather than specific as is confirmed by Russian *svet* "world, light" or by the Slovak *svet* "world" which is very close to *svit* "dawn, light".

Miracles in the Biblical sense of the world have been labelled by the word *mana* meaning power, authority, something extraordinary" usually in collocation with *hana* (i.e. *hana mana*).

Scripture is sometimes metaphorically labelled as *Hamani meita'i* "good book" (perhaps in analogy to the Greek *eu* "good" + *angelion* "message").

The lexeme *'ite* (basic meaning "to see") has been expanded to mean "to witness", for example as *ha'a'ite* "to show", *hei'ite* "for a witness".

Originally, there were no large settlements in the Marquesas, due to the configuration of the terrain notable for a frequent and typical occurrence of steep hills and hillsides clutching narrow valleys (*ka'avai*) where there were human settlements close to the streams. This explains the semantic spectrum of the lexeme *ka'avai* where the diachronous core "river, valley" has been metonymically extended to refer to "community", "village", "town".

Another semantic shift conditioned by different natural circumstances is observed in the case of *va'o* "fond d'une vallée", in English "the far end of the valley", that is the least inhabited part of the valley. J. Bicknell has employed *va'o* as an equivalent of desert although Marquesan has a special expression for such occasion, namely, *fenua ataha*.

The word *ma'ima'i* (or *makimaki*) may be translated (1) by the verb to desire, to wish but at the same time it refers (2) to the idea of will, resolution. These two meanings are not mutually exclusive, but there is one important difference between them – desire may be characterized as something spontaneous or instinctive, while will and/or resolution may be viewed as lacking the aspect of spontaneity.

Mana is one of the key ideas of the system of Marquesan and perhaps also of Polynesian religion and society defined as power in Dordillon, but this is no doubt too scanty and far from exhausting its characteristics. The utilization of *mana* in the lexeme *hana mana* "miracle" and *ha'amana* "to worship" again points out that its scale is very extensive, including at one end power as something natural and socially tangible and at the other end supernatural power. Is this a reflection of the principal absence of a contradiction between the two extremes, implying the essential continuity of this particular scale? An analogy to this may be seen in the semantic spectrum of *mate* "pain – disease – death – damnation" or *poho'e* "sainté — rescue – saving – deliverance — life". This repeatedly occurring indeterminacy is no specifically Marquesan feature, but a universal phenomenon and therefore the preference should be given to the term flexibility as more adequate.

An interesting set of creative terms deals with the sexual vices, namely *moe keukeu*, *moe faufau*, *moe a'ava*, and *ha'amako*.

The first term, *moe keukeu* (*moe* "to sleep" + *keu* "to play, amuse oneself", literally perhaps "to sleep for fun"; even if *keukeu* is explained by Dordillon as "très vif, turbulent, s'agiter, remuer sans cesse" (Dordillon 1999: 157), while completely lacking in Le Cléac'h 1997), obviously reflects the old idea of interpreting sex as play, something amusing, rascally and mischievous, perhaps irresponsible, for which attitude there is more than enough evidence, for example in E. S. C. Handy (Handy 1930) and in Willowdean C. Handy (Handy 1965: 138).

In *moe faufau*, the idea of sleeping (*moe*) is combined with *faufau* (or *hauhau*) where *faufau* (*hauhau*) is listed in Dordillon as "mauvais, déshonnête, abject, indigne, sale, dégoûtant, vilain, malpropre, impur" (Dordillon 1999: 121, 134), in a word as an opposite of "good, proper". The combination *moe faufau* interprets a sexual relationship in an expressly negative manner, that is as adultery. May it be regarded as being of a post-contact or missionary provenance?

The other two expressions (*moe a'ava* and *ha'amako*, both meaning "to fornicate") are semantically related: *a'ava* refers to a young shark while *mako* means shark in general. "Shark" has sexual connotations in other languages too, for example in Hawaiian it means a passionate lover, in Tahitian an ungovernable person (Tregear 1969: 210; *ibid.* he quotes the Marquesan word for shark as meaning a prostitute) while in New Guinean Pidgin the equivalent of girl-

shark (*sark meri*) refers to a prostitute. The expression *ha'amako* then means "to behave as a shark" (i.e. as a prostitute) while *moe a'ava* may be reproduced in English as "to sleep like a young shark".

The burial customs in the Marquesas differed considerably from burial as we know it in the Middle East and Europe. In Dordillon we find the term *papua tupapa'u* (fenced area for the dead); however, in his translation Bicknell uses *ona tapu*, that is "sacred place". No exact equivalent of cemetery was found in the archipelago and the best solution for a translation is obviously the lexical innovation used by Bicknell.

The term for sin is obviously derived through a semantic shift from *mikeo* the original meaning of which may be hidden in Dordillon's explication "désobéissance, rébellion, offense, faute" (Dordillon 1969: 186). In some instances the idea of sin is expressed by *pi'o* meaning "chiche, égoïste, qui sent mauvais, qui a mauvais goût, refus" (Dordillon 1969: 226).

An interesting problem of environmental provenance is finding a semantic equivalent of "snake". The problem implies not only the semantic kernel of the word itself but also its connotations relevant for Christian religion. Snakes do not live in the Marquesas, New Zealand, Hawaii, etc. However, in Polynesian mythology there is an animal functionally equivalent to the Biblical snake, namely the eel (*tuna, puhi*, etc.). In the translation of Biblical texts an adequate solution is available in the compound *puhifenua* "dry land eel". It is in fact an innovation consisting of *puhi* "eel" and *fenua* "land".

The Biblical word grace has been translated into Marquesan as *te meita'i* by Bicknell. Its meaning is given in Dordillon as "good, pleasant, convenient, beautiful, virtuous, wise, complacent" (Dordillon 1969: 184). In Crook's dictionary *meita'i* (written *meiti*) is explained as "good, pleasant, agreeable" (Crook 1998: 34).

In the New Testament we are often concerned with parables and in St. John's Gospel in 10, 1-16 and in 15, 1-8. Parables as a term are mentioned in John 10, 6 (*te'ao ha'atu*) and in 16, 25 (*te'ao mavivovivo*). *Te'ao ha'atu* is not included in Dordillon in this form; however, *hakatu* is explained as "marque, signe, image, modèle, exemple, comparaison" (Dordillon 1969: 130) which is compatible with the deep meaning of "parable". It is worth mentioning that Le Cléac'h has it as *hakātu* (Le Cléac'h 1997: 40) which is comparable with Maori *whakaatu* "to show, point out, call attention to" (Williams 1957, p. 20). Another Marquesan term for speaking in parables is *te'ao mavivovivo*, literally "to speak in troubled words" where *mavivovivo* is characterized by Dordillon as more or less equivalent to *te'ao mavi'i* and *te'ao mavivo* and explained as "difficile à apprendre par cœur, broder, amplifier, changer un discours, altérer la vérité" (Dordillon 1969: 183). Another term for speaking in figures is *te'ao hu'i* "to speak in an upturned manner" (Dordillon 1969: 259) and also causative or rather similitive *ha'ate'ao* (*ha'atekao*) to speak in figures (perhaps "to make as if speaking"). The status of figurative speech in Marquesan is thus comparable to how it is treated in other languages, such as Melpa in New Guinea (veiled speech, cf. Weiner in: Brenneis – Myers 1984: 176) and in the Trobriands they say according to Weiner: "We say words, but our minds do not believe those words" (Weiner in: Brenneis – Meyers 1984: 169).

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