

**Triple-A: Christian Missionaries as preservers of Indigenous languages
in Australia, Asia and Africa**

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Lutheran Missionaries' Aboriginal Lexicography**

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Abstract

This talk examines the outcomes of the preparation of missionaries before they left Germany to serve in a foreign land. Before their departure, missionaries were educated in documenting indigenous languages for their own benefit, and for the benefit of future missionaries.

Missionaries past and present have come close to the people whom they served, adapting to local traditions and customs much better than other European settlers. With their command of local languages, the missionaries often became advocates of indigenous people – a situation that not infrequently conflicted with the interests of local colonial governments, and was not the reason for which they were sent from Germany.

This paper will focus on the difficulty of translating religious terms and how missionaries dealt with this challenge. They soon came to realize that there were no satisfactory expressions for certain Christian phrases, and that positive concepts often had negative connotations in the target language. Which words did they finally introduce into their dictionaries?

Examples in this paper will be mainly taken from the “Dresden Four” (Teichelmann, Schürmann, Meyer and Klose) in South Australia, Hermann Kittel and Carl Graul for India and Emil Müller, Ernst Brutzer and Heinrich Pfitzinger in East Africa.

1. Introduction

History reveals that, since Protestant missions first began, German missionaries have recorded the languages of the indigenous peoples to whom they were sent. They did this not only through dictionaries and grammars, but also through the collection of folk songs and folk tales, and the description of religious systems.

Many examples show that their intensive engagement with indigenous languages and cultures often led the missionaries to a change in attitude. It almost seems that the deeper they penetrated into the secrets of a respective language, the more they became advocates of the language itself, and for the people who used this language as their mother tongue.

Today, on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the arrival in South Australia of the “Dresden Four”, let us first take a look at Asia and Africa. We will see how we all become part of the spirit of a language, and the culture to which it belongs, as we learn the language and investigate it further to improve our understanding.

At the beginning of their preparation for missionary service, missionaries of the Leipzig Mission Society – or the Dresden Mission Society, as it was called in the 1830s/40s – were clearly instructed to learn the language of those people to whom they were sent. The 19th annual report of the Dresden Missionary Society in 1838 explained the need to learn the ancient languages (Hebrew, Latin and Greek) and to be trained in the methods of understanding other languages (19th Annual Report of the Lutheran Missionary Society of Dresden for the period August 11, 1837 to August 15, 1838, p. 19).

The rules of the Society were directed at ensuring the candidates had the necessary linguistic capability for this task, rather than discovering later that they were not suited to mission service because of their limited language skills. In the same report we read:

"Without [such] efficient talents nobody can become a missionary. In particular he must have an effortless perceptive faculty and a special talent for languages, because he will have to deal with many people of a different mindset and may have to preach the Gospel in a foreign and perhaps very difficult language." (ibid. p. 25)¹

Mission linguistics has helped significantly in this process of learning, understanding and appreciating the culture of the nations they were sent to, whereby many missionaries, rather than becoming colonial officials and collaborators with colonial interests, became true missionaries *because of* mission linguistics.

2. Asia - India

The beginning of this approach can already be seen with the first German Protestant missionaries, **Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg** and **Heinrich Plütschau**, who were sent out to Tamil Nadu in South India in 1706 by the Danish-Halle Mission Society on behalf of the Danish Crown.

Just eight years later their work is described and the importance of language acquisition emphasised:

"The first great Difficulty they had to struggle with was ... getting 'A *competent Knowledge of the Malabarick Language*'. This however was judged indispensably necessary, for answering the character of a Missionary, though attended with almost insuperable Difficulties. It hath been observ'd by some, employ'd in the like Work, that the Use of an *Interpreter* hath no great Effect in an Undertaking of this Nature; Things being often altered, when they pass through the Mouth of other Men; particularly, if these be altogether destitute of an inward Sense of those Matters which they are, by their Words, to convey unto others. ... They compiled a Vocabulary of some thousands Words, being assisted therein by a *Malabar* School-master, whom they had hired for that Purpose. In the presence of this Man they heard every word rightly spelled, with the true pronunciation added in *Latin* letters, and the Signification put under it. But after all the Pains thus taken, they were still in the dark, as to the *Grammatical* construction of the words, the school master being unacquainted with Grammar-Learning, and so altogether unable to give 'em any satisfactory Inlet into the true construction of that intricate

¹ „Ohne tüchtige Anlagen kann Niemand Missionar werden. Insbesondere muss er ein leichtes Fassungsvermögen und ein besonderes Sprachtalent besitzen, weil er viel mit anderdenkenden Personen umgehen und das Evangelium in einer fremden, vielleicht schweren Sprache predigen soll.“

language." (Propagation of the Gospel to the East: Being an account of the success of the Danish Missionaries sent to the East Indies for the conversion of the Heathen in Malabar, London 1714; p. 5-7. Quoted from the English original, including emphasis),

This report mentions the general linguistic skills needed for mission service, but it also acknowledges that a more precise knowledge of the language is required.

"And to enter upon an entire *Translation*, seemed to be a Task, attended with almost insurmountable Difficulties. Not, as if this Language was not expressive enough, for uttering and explaining the sacred Writings; but by Reason of its *Singularity*, and particular Way of Delivery, altogether differing from the Languages in *Europe*." (ibid. p. 30)

So, Ziegenbalg described how his image of the people to whom he ministered changed with his own increasing understanding of their language.

"Initially, before we understood the language of these Pagans, we had very strange notions from looking at them only from the outside and at their deeds through [our own] eyes. But later, when we could talk with them in their language and inquire after everything properly, we found everything very different from what we had imagined at first." (quoted from an unpublished manuscript of 1713 in: Daniel Jeyaraj, Inculturation in Tranquebar, *Missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen*. New series volume 4, Erlangen, 1996, p. 52.)²

The Indian Theologian Daniel Jeyaraj studied Ziegenbalg's work with a focus on inculturation, and he describes this as the moment at which the colonial official became a true missionary (ibid.).

Thus, after 21 years of exposure to the Tamil language, Rev. Ziegenbalg suggested to the other missionaries in Tamil Nadu that they refrain from all abusive and negative descriptive epithets. The re-print of a small booklet that previously carried the title "The condemned Paganism" was then, after 1728, called "Without true knowledge". Considering the time in which such changes occurred, we must regard this as a major step in the appreciation of new cultures, because only through understanding the Tamil language had Ziegenbalg comprehended the true meaning of individual manners, customs and words.

The missionary **Ferdinand Kittel**, who was sent on behalf of the Basel Mission in 1853 to southern India in the present-day state of Karnataka, underwent a significant change of attitude over the years. His extensive correspondence gives us a good insight into how, over the course of time, he changed his approach to the people to whom he was sent; indeed, his attitude changed so profoundly that he identified a considerable lack of understanding on the part of his sending organization, the Basel Mission Society. In a letter dated 30 May, 1853, he described his highly ritualized daily schedule as a combination of prayers (starting at 5.30 with the native Christians), walks, meals, school and talks with local people to enhance his language and cultural knowledge

² "Wir selbst machten uns anfänglich, ehe wir die Sprache verstanden von diesen Heiden, sehr wunderliche Conzepte, welche wir sie nur bloß äußerlich samt ihrem thun mit den Augen anschaueten. Nachmahls aber, da man mit ihrer Sprache mit ihnen reden und sich alles recht erkundigen können, haben wir alles gantz anders gefunden, als wir uns erstlich eingeildet hatten."

(see Wendt, 2006, p. 40). What may sound like a relaxed lifestyle was the key to his change of attitude towards mission work. Many, many meetings with the people in his village brought to fruition his personal wish for change.

In January 1857 he wrote to the Basel Mission Society:

"As a missionary, I intend to take an even more humble position in the world than now; for example I do not want to live in a bungalow; ... also in nutrition I want to be closer to the natives, who have a meagre meal only twice a day and would prefer something better; neither do I want to live alone from the sponsorship by Christendom at home." (ibid. p. 43)

All this encouraged him in the understanding of his mission "to continue learning as a student" (ibid. p. 44).³ Two months later, on 7 March, 1857, Kittel went a step further and wrote:

"I would very much like to find a second home here, and the Hindus should then be my fellow countrymen ..." (ibid. p. 46).⁴

The Basel Mission was not at all excited about Kittel's project but rather encouraged him to concentrate on his language studies. This he did with such diligence that he was able, through his studies, to compile a comprehensive dictionary with more than 30,000 entries, as well as a grammar. He also undertook intensive studies of indigenous poetry and music, and documented them carefully. This study of music and poetry moved him to propose something very unusual for his time in the mid-19th century. It was previously a common practice for missionaries to India to combine German hymns with new words in the languages of the indigenous population. In April 1868, however, Kittel suggested linking Kanaresian melodies with Christian lyrics, as he had recently observed.

"Earlier they had used only the songs of the Kanaresian hymnal which were edited according to German patterns and melodies; now they have about a dozen songs of Christian content in native garb, even utilizing borrowed melodies of famous Tamil singers." (ibid. p. 65)

The proposal was strictly rejected by the Basel Mission ("however, they [the mission board] believe your proposals are imprecise and not clear enough, and misleading and thus a matter for concern.") (ibid. p. 75)⁵. This verdict put an end to all attempts of inculturation and indigenization of Christian faith and life in South India for almost one hundred years.

Unwavering, Ferdinand Kittel continued his course and documented the *Kanaresian* language and culture to a very high standard. Although he received no recognition from his sending organization during his lifetime, he was accorded high honour posthumously. On 6 September 2001, a monument to the missionary and linguist Ferdinand Kittel was unveiled in the centre of Karnataka, the capital of Bangalore.

³ *"Ich möchte gerne als Missionar eine noch demüthigere Stellung in der Welt einnehmen als jetzt, so z. B. nicht in einem Bangalo wohnen; ... ferner in der Kost mich mehr den Natives anbequemen, welche hier z.B. nur 2 Mal des Tages ein mageres Essen haben, und doch auch gern etwas Besseres hätten; - ferner nicht gern ganz von der Unterstützung der Christenheit zu Haus leben."*

⁴ *"Ich möchte hier gern eine zweite Heimath finden, und die Hindoos sollten mir dann die Heimathsleute sein..."*

⁵ *"Dagegen halte sie (sc. die Kommission) deine Vorschläge für nicht klar und präcis genug, sondern für mißverständlich und d. darum nicht für unbedenklich."*

This leads us directly to the four missionaries who were sent to South Australia in 1838, and whose work was also only posthumously acknowledged. But before that, let us take a brief look at Africa, or, more precisely, at the work of some missionaries from the Leipzig Mission Society in the Kilimanjaro region.

3. Africa – Tanzania

The Leipzig Mission commenced work in East Africa in 1892, fully aware of the risk and consequences of its first mission effort in a German colony. Therefore, in 1893 Director Karl von Schwartz gave the following instruction to the first missionaries for Africa, before they set out on their voyage: "Remember that you serve the Kingdom of God and not the Empire."

Emil Müller was one of these first missionaries and reached Machame at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro on 5 October 1893. This place had been chosen because of its geographical distance from the German army stationed at Moshi, and to show that colonial interests were not part of the missionaries' role. Müller's major lifetime achievement was the "Dictionary of the Džagga Language", published in 1947, but other previous publications on linguistic research informed his work.

In 1895, after little more than a year in the country, Müller reported enthusiastically on his first encounter with the indigenous languages and his first learning results, with special regard to the Madschame language. Six languages were spoken in this region alone, including the three indigenous vernaculars: Swahili, Kimadschame and Kimasai; and the three foreign languages: English, German and Tamil.

Müller dedicated his attention to Kimadschame as a dialect of Kidschagga, and was truly amazed at the high degree of language competency of the population.

"All the natives speak extremely accurately and error-free, without having ever been in a school, starting from a small boy, who carries little else on his body but a string of pearls with amulets, to the old man who mumbles only silently." (Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionsblatt 1895, p. 361.)⁶

In this early report, Müller described the accuracy with which the indigenous language forms words such as plural forms marked by prefixes (man = ndu, pl. = wandu), or word classes which form the attribution of the class by the prefix. Müller considered this highly complex linguistic system, the mastering of which requires in-depth knowledge.

"I want to emphasise that we have before us a highly detailed [language] system, which we have to admire." (ibid.)⁷

In addition, Müller described the value-system of a society with clearly-defined names for every known plant and animal, but which appears to be totally devoid of any words for abstract concepts.

⁶ "Denn die Eingeborenen sprechen alle, vom Büblein an, das kaum etwas anderes an seinem Leibe trägt, als eine Perlenkette mit Amuletten, bis zum Greis, der nur noch vor sich hinmurmelt, äußerst genau und fehlerfrei, ohne daß sie je in einer Schule gewesen wären."

⁷ "Ich wollte nur andeuten, daß wir hier ein bis ins kleinste ausgeführtes System vor uns haben, das wir bewundern müssen."

"Anger, doubt, hope... modesty, honour, welfare... are concepts familiar to them — because they are people with a spirit and a passionate heart, as we are — but because they do not reflect about it, the respective terms are missing. Is it still necessary to ensure that this language for preaching the true Evangelical Gospel must first be developed? What shall we do with a word for God, which at the same time means the Sun (iruwa); what with a word for sin, which has the simple connotation of 'by mistake' and is used in the context of a minor thoughtlessness?" (ibid. p. 363)⁸.

If the mission endeavour was to achieve any degree of success, then it must be conducted in the native language. Therefore, in preparation for their service, the missionaries of the Leipzig Mission Society were required to learn Swahili before leaving Germany. However, upon reaching the Kilimanjaro region Müller realized that Swahili was definitely not the indigenous mother tongue of the people who lived there. To them it was a foreign language, as it was to him.

Therefore, Müller criticised the teaching of Swahili to missionaries in Germany as an instrument of teaching and preaching, pointing out that nobody would understand the Gospel "in a language other than his mother tongue and capture it's realities with his heart" (ibid. p. 365).⁹

Müller described some key phrases in Swahili and Kimadschame as evidence in order to convince his colleagues back in Germany that intensive language study, not only in Swahili, but also in other indigenous languages, was essential for mission work. To reinforce this, he also quoted Martin Luther's "Open Letter on Translation" in the context of his African mission:

"Then they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking Kimadschame with them." (ibid.)¹⁰ --

Seven years later, in October 1900, **Ernst Brutzer** was assigned to the Kamba-Mission. Against the background of earlier linguistic studies and translations, Brutzer made the following observations about the need for comprehensive language training:

"Comparing the two Kamba Gospel translations (of Mark and Luke) mentioned earlier, we realize a big difference in their linguistic character: here is still

⁸ "Zorn, Zweifel, Hoffnung, ... Zucht, Ehre, Wohlfahrt, ... sind ihnen zwar dem Begriff nach bekannt - denn sie sind Menschen mit einem Geist und einem leidenschaftlichen Herzen, wie wir auch - aber weil man nicht darüber nachdenkt, so fehlen auch die Worte dafür. Ist's da noch nötig, zu versichern, daß diese Sprache für die eigentliche evangelische Verkündigung erst zugerichtet werden muß? Was sollen wir mit einem Gottesnamen anfangen, der zugleich die Sonne bedeutet (iruwa); was mit einem Wort für Sünde, welches einfach "Versehen" heißt und auf jede kleine Gedankenlosigkeit angewandt wird. ..."

⁹ "in einer anderen als seiner Muttersprache mit dem Herzen die Thatsachen des Evangeliums zu erfassen"

¹⁰ Martin Luther actually wrote: „den man mus nicht die buchstaben inn der lateinischen sprachen fragen, wie man sol Deutsch reden, wie diese esel thun, sondern, man mus die mutter jhm hause, die kinder auff der gassen, den gemeinen man auff dem marckt drumb fragen, und den selbigen auff das maul sehen, wie sie reden, und darnach dolmetzchen, so verstehen sie es den und mercken, das man Deutsch mit In redet.“ English: “We shall not ask the letters of the Latin language to tell us how to speak German, as these donkeys do. Rather, we have to ask the mother at home, the children on the street, and the commoner at the marketplace. We must be guided by their language and by the way they speak, and translate accordingly. Then they will understand and recognize that we are speaking German with them.“ Martin Luther, Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen 1530, ed. F. Herrmann and O. Brenner (Weimar Edition WA30.2, S. 637).

uncertainty and vagueness, there a clear insight into the language." (Ev-Luth. Missionsblatt 1905, p. 389.)¹¹

In addition, Brutzer explained that the recent translation of the Book of Acts could leave out all Anglicisms and German-isms because there was now a suitably advanced understanding of the Kamba language. In former times they had utilised loan words for theological terms from Swahili (as an example he quoted the term 'Ghost'), but now they could use words of the Kamba language, or, due to their knowledge of the language, newly-introduced words (an example being 'Conscience') which described and reflected what needed to be expressed.

It is also remarkable that in Brutzer's report he mentioned the linguistic informants who assisted him with his translation work by name.

"First I performed the translation from the original text and then discussed it with my loyal, intelligent language mentor Mumo wa Ndzoka and after that sent it to the other mission stations for review. When the paper sheet came back, I discussed it again with our talented Christian girl Malata and considered with her the comments and corrections of the brothers." (ibid. 390)

Time and again, other missionaries also acknowledged their informants by name, in appreciation of their valuable contribution. Missionary **Heinrich Pfitzinger**, for instance, collected Wakamba folk tales, produced a bilingual record in Kikamba and German, and explained how this was achieved: "These two stories ... I've received from my former servant Mudjota, a fourteen-year old Mkamba boy from Jimba." (Ev-Luth. Missionsblatt, 1898, p. 224)¹².

Like Kittel in India, missionaries in East Africa experienced the fruits of their labour during their lifetime, even if they were significantly set back by the two World Wars.

4. Australia - the "Dresden Four"

The language work of the four Dresden missionaries ended with the announcement of the cessation of the mission field in South Australia. But their story had begun with enthusiasm.

The ordination ceremony of the first two missionaries from Dresden on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany, in Altenburg, has been extensively documented (see Fr. Hesekei 1838). Eight months later, on 14 October, 1838 Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann (at the age of 23) and Christian Gottlob Teichelmann (31) reached South Australia, the new British colony. Two years later August Eduard Meyer and Samuel Gottlieb Klose followed them.

For 10 years, these four missionaries lived, learned and taught alongside Aboriginal people in South Australia.

At the beginning of their activities and in the context of their posting, important instructions were given to them. We will hear later how they are still used today at the Leipzig Mission. To acquire the indigenous language was of utmost importance, so Teichelmann and

¹¹ "Wenn wir die beiden erwähnten Kamba-Evangelienübersetzungen (des Markus und Lukas) vergleichen, so finden wir einen großen Unterschied zwischen ihnen und ihrem sprachlichem Charakter: dort noch eine tastende Ungewißheit und Verschwommenheit, hier eine klare Einsicht in die Sprachgesetze."

¹² "Die beiden Erzählungen ... habe ich von meinem früheren Diener Mudjota, einem etwa vierzehnjährigen Mkamba-Jungen aus Jimba."

Schürmann went into action immediately upon their arrival in Adelaide. Optimistic about their project, the Dresden Mission News in 1839 reported that "they expected us to present God's plan of salvation in Christ to them [i.e., the Adelaide Aborigines] within another half year". (Dresdener Missionsnachrichten 1839, p. 95)¹³. The same report, however, also shows the limited perception of Aboriginal culture by the two young missionaries in those early months. Kanuitja (in T&S 1840: Kudnuitya), an Aboriginal Elder known as Captain Jack by the English, appeared to be moved by a conversation with the missionaries about a ritual dance. He eventually suspended the performance because "the whites who loved it, and the blacks, who performed it, are very evil" (Dresdener Missionsnachrichten 1839, p. 95 + 147).

In his letters to the society in January and February, 1839, however, Teichelmann reported on the difficulties of language acquisition.

"Our knowledge of the language of the natives is growing only slowly, because major obstacles stand in the way of its acquisition. I do not even refer to the lack of written sources in the language, but the fact that the natives speak among themselves so incredibly fast and with such unprecedented abbreviations that until now, by listening to their conversations, we gain nothing at all." (Dresdener Missionsnachrichten 1839, S. 146f)¹⁴

Despite this, the two missionaries repeatedly tried to speak with the people around them about faith, but recognized that their efforts had "*harmed as much as benefited*" (Dresdener Missionsnachrichten 1839, p. 148).

Apparently, through their interest in communicating matters of faith, they gradually developed a deeper understanding of the life and culture of the people. So Schürmann was able to report in February 1839:

"It is my pleasure to assure you that the natives of South Australia are not entirely without religious beliefs. For some time, I had included into my dictionary the term *Kuinjo* (*ui* being a diphthong [*Kuinyu* in 2010 Revised Spelling]) without a perception of its meaning. However, only a few days ago, brother Teichelmann learned that *Kuinjo* refers to a small, evil and sick man from the skies, and sitting at the heart and on the shoulders of the black people, he causes them pain." (Dresdener Missionsnachrichten 1839, p. 148)¹⁵

In addition, Schürmann then described the manifestations of the phenomenon, and undertook a religious comparison to analyse what he had heard. In subsequent years, the missionaries further deepened their knowledge of such phenomena and again, in the following

¹³ "in einem halben Jahre ... ihnen (sc. den Aborigines) schon den Heilsplan Gottes in Christo darlegen zu können".

¹⁴ „Unsere Kenntniß von der Sprache der Eingebornen mehrt sich nur allmählig, indem der Erwerbung derselben bedeutende Schwierigkeiten entgegen stehen. Dahin rechne ich gar nicht einmal den Mangel an Schriften in der Sprache, sondern den Umstand, daß die Eingebornen so ungemein schnell und mit so beispiellosen Wortabkürzungen unter sich sprechen, daß wir von dem Anhören ihrer Unterhaltungen bis jetzt gar nichts gewinnen.“

¹⁵ „Es macht mir Vergnügen, Ihnen jetzt mit Gewißheit versichern zu können, daß die Eingebornen Süd-Australiens nicht ganz ohne religiöse Vorstellungen sind. Schon längst hatte ich in meinem Wörterbuch unter andern noch bedeutungslosen Wörtern das Wort *Kuinjo* (*ui* ist Diphthong) ohne zu wissen, was sie damit sagen wollten, bis Bruder Teichelmann vor einigen Tagen herausbekam, daß *Kuinjo* ein in der Höhe sitzendes krankes böses Männchen ist, daß sich den schwarzen Leuten auf die Herzgrube und die Schultern setzt und ihnen das Schmerzen verursacht.“ N.B. Teichelmann and Schürmann used ‘ty’ to represent the lamino-palatal stop when writing for publications aimed at an English-speaking audience but ‘tj’ when writing for a German-speaking audience.

year, described Kuinjo in even more detail (see *Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1840, S. 108f). In hindsight it seems that the missionaries approached this challenge with a phenomenology of religion in mind, rather than just the study of language. Consequently, their perception and respect of the host culture grew even more. Unfortunately it would lead too far afield to discuss this approach in detail.

Teichelmann and Schürmann knew very well that the language of the Aborigines might be lost as a result of being banned by the colonial authorities. On the other hand, they described in their reports to Dresden that it was a highly developed and interesting language. The following example, taken from a report in 1839, may shed more light:

"A few days ago, we went shopping in the city together with a boy by the name Waritja, [Warritya in T&S1840 and 2010 Revised Spelling] who for several days had slept, ate and worked in our house, but who unfortunately left us again. On the way we passed a tent and we asked him how it would be called in his language; he gave the expected answer: I do not know; but after he thought about it for a moment, he said: TURNKI WODLI [*Turnki wardli* in 2010 Revised Spelling]. The first word is a general term for cloth and the latter is hut or house, so that the expression translated reads: cloth-house ... We definitely know that the boy did not remember this composition, but formed it new, and we believe this example proves how easily the language can be perfected. So it seems that if it dies, which the people here believe and seem to hope, the reason at least lies not in itself." (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1839, p. 98f)¹⁶

It is remarkable that in this report on the language Teichelmann and Schürmann passed down the name of the boy, Waritja, thus indicating their closeness with, and appreciation of, indigenous people. Time and again, the missionaries mentioned their informants by name, be they Wattewattipinna or Tuitpurro (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1840, p. 115) or Wauwitpinna (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1840 p. 117), to give just three more examples. Thus the first missionaries started a tradition that was taken up by most of the later missionaries (such as Brutzer).

They also specified geographical names in the indigenous languages as a way of distinguishing the different language groups, for instance regarding the Murray River:

"To prove language variations, [a] traveller noted the various names for the Murray River: At Encounter Bay it is called *Goolwa*; in Pomunda, *Paunkay*; and *Karpay*, and sixty miles further away, *Yungka*." (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1840, p. 114)¹⁷

¹⁶ „Vor einigen Tagen gingen wir mit einem Knaben, Namens Waritja, der mehrere Tage in unserem Haus schlief, aß und arbeitete, der aber leider wieder davon gegangen ist, nach der Stadt, um einzukaufen; unterwegs kamen wir bei einem Zelt vorbei und wir fragten, wie es hieße; er gab die erwartete Antwort: ich weiß nicht; nachdem er sich indeß einen Augenblick besonnen, sagte er: Turnki wodli. Das erstere Wort ist allgemeine Bezeichnung für Zeug und das letztere heißt Hütte, Haus, so daß der Ausdruck übersetzt lautet: Zeughaus, nur freilich in einem anderen Sinne als in Deutschland. Wir wissen bestimmt, das der Knabe sich dieser Zusammensetzung nicht erinnerte, sondern sie selbst bildete, und wir meinen, dieses Beispiel beweise, wie leicht sich die Sprache vervollkommen ließe.“

¹⁷ „Um die Abweichungen unter den Dialecten zu belegen, führt der Reisende die verschiedenen Namen, welche ein und derselbe Fluß, der Murray, hat. In Encounter Bay heißt er Goolwa, in Pomunda Paunkay und Karpay und sechzig Meilen weiter Yungka.“

Because of the missionaries' geographic descriptions we now know the original names, so the original geographical designations can be determined on the basis of these descriptions. This may also help us to discover more detail about ownership of land by different indigenous groups.

In 1840, missionaries Klose and Meyer received similar instructions to those which Teichelmann and Schürmann had been given two years earlier. (see *Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1840, p. 9ff).

Soon after their departure, some members of the mission society began to question whether there was any point in sending more missionaries to Australia. Yet, the work of language documentation continued undeterred. A report by Clamor Schürmann concerning a recent successful recording at that time of the Aboriginal language on Eyre Peninsula was reprinted in the *Dresden Mission News* of 1845: "From my last letters you will have seen that my word list of the *Parnkalla* language has been printed at the expense of the Governor" (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1845, p. 33).¹⁸ But again he encountered the limitations of abstract terms, and states that "learning a language, which must precede all immediate and actual mission work, is a serious and boring task, which can be accelerated not so much by diligence and zeal than by patience and perseverance" (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1845, p. 33).

In summing up, Schürmann is quoted as saying that he

"was not yet able to teach the natives in *complete clearness* the meaning of the terms repentance and grace, heaven and hell, and salvation and damnation. He even thinks that hardly a word can be found [in the vernacular language] that, without paraphrasing it, could reasonably well express the notion of 'redemption'." (*Dresdener Missionsnachrichten* 1845, p. 33).¹⁹

Despite pleas for more patience, the Mission in South Australia was closed in 1846. Karl Graul informed the society members of this decision in the 28th annual report of the Society (cf. *28 Jahresbericht* 1846, p. 8-9).

A mission that was once considered a failure may today be called a success, at least in one respect: the recording and documentation of indigenous languages. The learning and study of the indigenous language was one of the key instructions given to the four Dresden missionaries, not as an ultimate objective but as an instrument to assist their mission work. The fruits of these labours were only to be realised more than 160 years later when their documents and work are used for awakening sleeping Aboriginal languages like Kurna, Ngarrindjeri or Barngala. The Dresden missionaries' description of Aboriginal people and the land they were living in is also used nowadays for Aboriginal land claims. Other fruits of the missionaries' achievements may also exist – unseen by us, but visible to God. In their commitment to the Aboriginal people the missionaries sowed the seeds, and these may still bear fruit in years to come.

Only history will show whether the missionaries' notion – that land ownership must be granted to the Aboriginal people – may become a success story as well.

¹⁸ "Aus meinen letzten Briefe werden Sie ersehen haben, daß meine Wörtersammlung der Parnkalla-Mundart auf Kosten des Gouverneurs gedruckt ist."

¹⁹ „..., daß er noch nicht im Stande sei, den Eingebornen vollkommen deutlich Begriffe von Buße und Gnade, von Himmel und Hölle, von Seligkeit und Verdammnis beizubringen, ja er meint sogar, daß schwerlich ein Wort zu finden sei, das, ohne Zuhilfenahme der Umschreibung, den Begriff ‚Erlösung‘ nur einigermaßen genügend ausdrücke.“

5. Professionalism and instrumentalization of missionary linguistics in the beginning of the 20th century.

The German missionaries in South Australia and South India were free of any colonial interest from their home country.

However, while the first German missionaries in East Africa clearly kept aside from any colonial interests, increasing nationalist sentiments in Germany led to the instrumentalisation of their language documentation. The linguist and orientalist **Carl Meinhof** (1857-1944) played a significant role in this process. He proposed that missionaries should do everything in their power to learn and to document languages. He spoke at many Mission conferences, and his lectures have been published primarily by the mission societies in Basel and Berlin.

Meinhof was quite clear about the tools and skills that missionaries should learn:

"Since missionaries learn the language from the mouth of people to compile grammars and dictionaries, there is no doubt that they have to bring with them skills for their linguistic tasks." (Meinhof, p. 15)²⁰.

But he made no bones about the fact that this should all happen in the interests of the colonial powers. "[The missionary] has first and foremost to learn the European languages of the colonies to which [he] is sent." (ibid. p. 9)

The Website of the *Norddeutsche Mission* (Bremen) reveals Meinhof's true intention with the following quote:

"As soon as the native can read and write German, he can partially access German conversations and magazines. Of course, this does not mean that he considers himself a German — this opinion would soon be denied to him. However, he will use the resulting insights as much as possible to inform his people about the intentions of the Germans and the political and moral conditions of Germany. This will be all the more dangerous the more limited his horizon is." (<http://www.norddeutschemission.de/index.php?id=527&L=1>)²¹

Thus, indigenous languages were acquired and promoted, not only for the preaching of the Gospel, but also to keep the population's self-confidence at a low level by giving them no good reason to learn the European languages of the colonial masters. And the same was true for the missionaries: with a command of the vernacular language, they were able to make a deep impression on the hearts and minds of the people when introducing the Gospel.

²⁰ "Da die Missionare aber einmal Sprachen aus dem Munde der Leute aufnehmen, Grammatiken und Wörterbücher verfassen sollen, unterliegt es keinem Zweifel, dass sie Fertigkeiten für linguistische Aufgaben mitbringen müssen."

²¹ „Sobald der Eingeborene deutsch lesen und schreiben kann, sind ihm deutsche Gespräche und deutsche Blätter teilweise zugänglich. Dies hat nun auf ihn natürlich nicht die Wirkung, dass er sich für einen Deutschen hält – diese Meinung würde ihm auch bald genommen werden, sondern er wird, so viel er kann, die so gewonnene Erkenntnis benutzen, um sein Volk über die Absichten der Deutschen und die politischen und sittlichen Zustände Deutschlands zu unterrichten. Dies wird umso gefährlicher sein, je beschränkter sein Gesichtskreis ist.“

"As time progressed, and Meinhof became the doyen of African studies, known not only in Germany and South Africa but also far beyond, his ideas on ethnicity and language dominated the field and came to determine how African groups were classified. This classification would be grounded in both racial and cultural precepts, reflecting Meinhof's position as both a missionary acolyte and a firm supporter of bourgeois German imperialism." (Pugach, p. 91)

Meinhof's position prevailed widely, although others such as the Director of the Leipzig Mission, Carl Paul, repeatedly criticized the colonial attitude without completely undermining the system of colonialism. Before World War I, Paul wrote:

"Colonial politics in its pure culture is expressively egoistic. A nation that has acquired colonies isn't on a path of charity [...] The motherland will feed on the colonies, enriching herself at their expense. The [Christian] mission places itself in an expressive opposition to such selfish aspirations. It will gain nothing for itself from the colonies, but it wants to deliver something which is of a high [moral] value to the overseas colonies." (Paul, p. 218)²²

According to Paul, mission and colonial politics easily turn into conflicting positions.

"For many Europeans, to see a missionary as an advocate for the natives, is a thorn in their side. ... It is understandable that this advocacy for the interest of the natives is annoying to some colonists as it is considered a barrier to the master race mentality and the ruthless exploitation of the land and people." (Paul, p. 226)²³

6. Encouragement for the future

If, today, in my capacity as Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Leipzig Inc. I send out long-term mission co-workers or volunteers to overseas partner churches, I quote from the instructions given to missionaries Teichelmann and Schürmann in 1838 – 175 years ago.

Christian Gottlob Teichelmann and Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann commenced their journey in 1838, and two years later August Eduard Meyer and Samuel Gottlieb Klose followed them. Their instructions are still relevant today, as can be seen from the following points.

In 1838, the instructions said:

"However, we ask you not to enter into a deeper relationship with a possibly emerging [i.e. German migrant] congregation but to serve them only as guest

²² „Die Kolonialpolitik ist in ihrer Reinkultur eine ausgesprochene Egoistin. Wenn ein Volk Kolonien erwirbt, geht es nicht auf den Pfaden der Wohltätigkeit [...] Das Mutterland will von den Kolonien zehren, sich auf deren Kosten bereichern. Die Mission stellt sich in einen ausgesprochenen Gegensatz zu solchen egoistischen Bestrebungen. Sie will aus den Kolonien für sich nichts holen; sie will etwas, und zwar ein hohes Gut, in die überseeischen Gebiete hinaustragen.“

²³ "Vielen Europäern ist es ferner ein Dorn im Auge, daß der Missionar häufig als Verteidiger der Eingeborenen auftritt. ... Daß dieses Eintreten für die Interessen der Eingeborenen manchen Kolonisten lästig ist, kann man verstehen; denn es wird damit dem Herrenmenschen und der rücksichtslosen Ausnutzung des Landes und Volkes eine Schranke gezogen.“

preachers, thus to live always unimpeded for the missionary service." (Instruktion, p. 681)²⁴

Earlier in these instructions, the mission board had recommended that the two missionaries establish amicable relationships with fellow migrants, especially the German Lutherans, to seek contact with them and to promote the building of the church —not to become their pastor, however, but rather to maintain this relationship in the hope that these congregations might later support the mission financially. And indeed, we see that the Dresden missionaries developed close relationships with the Anglicans, Wesleyans and Baptists, taking the children from Piltawodli [Pirltawardli] to sing to their congregations.

Discussions with our returning missionaries show that the very same instructions given to the first Dresden missionaries are still relevant today. If missionaries give in to the temptation of seeking a "deeper relationship" with the surrounding migrant community and engaging with other long-term expatriates, their process of an open and inter-cultural encounter and exchange with the local people may be hindered, or perhaps even prevented, as the difficulties of overseas service are often experienced in such encounters. Reflecting on the mission experience in the context of professional exchange with other expats may be quite helpful. But to be "always free for mission service", the missionary needs to place himself or herself in the service of the overseas partner church; to live with them and to share their joys, concerns and needs. And to be able to live in a convivial atmosphere, it is essential to learn the language of the people to whom one is sent.

Therefore, the following instruction was given to Teichelmann and Schürmann:

"At the same time you will engage yourself with the language of the natives and thus, right from the start, familiarize yourself with a tool essential for your efficacy amongst the heathen. We are convinced that you will make the effort to learn the vernacular in the most thorough and easy way possible. Where possible, you will engage a teacher and study the grammar, and also meet the people to grasp the spoken language in their day-to-day life." (ibid.)²⁵.

Where our missionaries today succeed in effectively learning the local language, there is also a starting point of an inter-cultural exchange, and our staff change from being mere employees to becoming friends and members of the family and community of those to whom they are sent.

The trials and tribulations of our overseas partner churches continue to be their own troubles and hardships. But our missionaries in far flung regions may become advocates for those whose language, faith and culture are still largely ignored.

²⁴ „Wir bitten Sie aber, in kein näheres Verhältnis mit der etwa sich bildenden Gemeinde einzugehen, sondern sich ihrer nur als Gastprediger anzunehmen, um stets unbehindert für den Missionsdienst leben zu können.“

²⁵ „Gleichzeitig wollen Sie sich mit der Erlernung der Sprache der Ureinwohner befassen, und so von Anfang an sich mit einem Mittel bekannt machen, wodurch Ihre Wirksamkeit unter den Heiden wesentlich bedingt ist. Wir sind davon überzeugt, dass Sie sich bemühen werden, jene Mundart auf die gründlichste und leichteste Weise zu erlernen, dass Sie sowohl, wo möglich, einen Lehrer annehmen und die Grammatik studieren, als auch unter das Volk gehen werden, um den mündlichen Ausdruck aus dem Leben aufzufassen.“

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