Language Ideology and White Normativity in the Church:  
A Story of the Uniting Church in Australia

Abstract:

In this article I explored the correlation between language ideology behind linguistic inequality and white normativity in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). For this, I undertook literature review as a theoretical study and conducted in-depth written interviews with sixteen respondents who had been involved with the UCA at least for more than ten years. And then, I analyzed the UCA’s identity as the church as a pilgrim people described in two significant documents from a socio-linguistic perspective to investigate how its language has been used within the church. As a result, I found that the language ideology of the UCA is still white-European centered, and suggested a comprehensive identity, Second Peoples as migrants (gērîm), as a way to (re) fashion its language ideology to be more inclusive and multicultural.

Introduction

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) is a Protestant denomination in Australia. According to the latest Australian Census held in 2016, the UCA is the third largest Christian denomination following the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, and is the largest non-government provider of community and health services in Australia. The UCA was established in 1977 when three denominations came together: the Methodist Church of Australia, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and the Congregational Union of Australia. The ecumenical spirit of the UCA was directly related to its policy of inclusion and anti-discrimination. The Basis of Union, the document that set the foundation of the union, declares, “It believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationship with Churches in Asia and the Pacific.”1

In 1985, the 4th Assembly of the UCA declared, “We are a multicultural church,”2 and since then, it has endeavored to create an equal space for all culturally and linguistically

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1 Basis of Union: Being the Final Revision Prepared by the Joint Commission on Church Union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, (Melbourne, Australia: Uniting Church in Australia, 1972; revised in 1992), paragraph 2.

2 Uniting Church in Australia, "Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry ",

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diverse groups and made efforts to provide non-English speaking people with opportunities to work in its congregations or agencies as ministers, deacons, or staff. However, when it comes to its higher leadership such as the president of the national assembly, the moderator of each state Synod, or the general secretary of the assembly and each Synod, it seems hard to say the UCA is a multicultural church. Since its establishment in 1977, there have been 16 presidents of the national assembly including the president-elect whose term will commence in July 2021, but there has not been a president with a non-Anglo or non-European background. The situation of the moderators of the six Synods is no different. For example, in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, there has been only one non-Anglo moderator in its history. The Synod of South Australia has not had any non-White moderator while electing 19 moderators until the present. The cases of general secretary of the national assembly and each Synod are almost the same. How should we understand this white-dominance in the higher leadership of the UCA?

In relation to this matter, Swee-Ann Koh, Coordinator of Intercultural Community Development in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, mentions racism in the church. He states, “Is there racism in the church? . . . . I have witnessed – and heard from members of the minority groups within the UCA – that they have experienced racism and racial prejudice in our church.” He insists that racism in the church is not personal but systemic; racism is like “a web of interlocking and reinforcing institutions that continue to privilege the dominant culture.” For him, this systemic prejudice is a core reason for the white-dominance in the UCA. As an example of the structural intolerance, he shared his experiences of linguistic inequality within the church; he was rejected by some congregations due to his foreign accent. He reckons that such accent discrimination still occurs in the church consciously or unconsciously, and he claims that the UCA must be ‘a multi accents church’, in which various non-native accents should not be disadvantaged in any way.

Linguistic inequality has been one of the primary forms of discrimination around the world. It happens subtly as a way of racial subordination or reinforcing majority privilege. Given that language has been used as an instrument of power, the language barrier seems to be closely related to the white normativity of the Uniting Church. However, until now there has been little research carried out on linguistic discrimination in the UCA. This paper will examine the correlation between language inequality and Anglo-dominance in the UCA. For

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4 Ibid.


this, I will focus on language ideology behind linguistic discrimination and analyze the way language is used within the church, through investigating the meaning of the UCA’s identity, *the church as a pilgrim people*, in two critical documents: the Basis of Union and the Vision Statement (2016-2022) of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (the Vic/Tas Synod). Through this analysis, I will provide clues about the language ideology of the UCA, and suggest how to make a step further in creating a brave space in the UCA beyond its white normativity.

**Methodology**

I undertook a literature review as a theoretical study and conducted in-depth written interviews as qualitative research. I selected sixteen respondents, fourteen ministers and two ordination candidates, to listen to their voices about the matter of language and equality in the UCA, using as criteria: gender, age, ethnicity, and duration of service. Considering the limited scope of this paper, I chose the Vic/Tas Synod as the research site. I conducted written interviews with all participants, and when necessary, had additional conversations for clarification of their interview answers. All names of participants mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms. To improve the validity and credibility of the data I used two strategies: the constant comparative method and member-checking. First, I analysed coded materials in detail by using the constant comparative method that focuses on explicit coding and repeated readings within and across coded materials not only for collecting data, but also for discovering insights and implications through deep analysis of the data. I also examined the adequacy and accuracy of my data interpretation through member-checking, through which each respondent could confirm whether my analysis and interpretation of their interviews accorded with their original sharing.

**Literature Review on Language and Equality**

According to a UN report in 2013, more than 232 million people live or work in a country where they were not born, which shows that we live in a global village. Australia is one of the most multicultural societies in the world. The 2016 Australian Census reports that 26% of all Australians were born overseas. This dynamic cultural mix is directly connected

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8 Among sixteen respondents, thirteen were the UCA ministers involved with the Vic/Tas Synod, two were the UCA ordination candidates, and one had served the UCA for a long time and recently transferred to another denomination. Nine were congregational ministers at the time of interview, and five institutional ministers working in the Presbytery, Synod, or Assembly. Ten were males and six females; two was older than 60, seven between 51-60 years old, six between 41-50 years old, and one younger than 40. Eleven were non-native English speakers and five native English speakers; among eleven non-native speakers, seven migrated from Asian countries such as China, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore and Sri Lanka, while four came from the islands of Polynesia such as Tonga and Samoa. All sixteen participants had long been involved with the UCA; six had served the UCA more than 30 years, six more than 20 years and four more than 10 years.

to using diverse languages in Australia. More than one in five Australians (21%) speak languages other than English at home, and the number of non-native English speakers has steadily increased.\(^\text{10}\) In this multilingual context within an English-dominant country, the matter of language inequality has been highlighted as a critical issue of discrimination as in other multicultural nations.

Douglas Kibbee claims that language is a critical barrier to equality and justice; he says “we judge others by their language and through our language. Language is a fundamental inequality of any society. This is all the more so in a multi-ethnic society at a time of mass migrations.”\(^\text{11}\) Language has been a primary means for oppressing the marginalized and perpetuating discriminatory situations.\(^\text{12}\) For, as Reginald Oh claims, language is directly related to power. Oh argues that “whoever controls the linguistic terms of the debate also controls and frames the debate according to terms more favorable to his or her substantive position.”\(^\text{13}\) However, the way linguistic discrimination occurs is ambiguous.\(^\text{14}\) Linguistic inequality is regarded as illegitimate and irrational, but it tends to be accepted as inevitable in the name of efficiency. Jonathan Pool argues that this ambivalence is (re)made due to vagueness. He says that when notions like equality and discrimination are applied to language, those concepts tend to be used ambiguously and inconsistently because they are entangled with the matter of vested interests.\(^\text{15}\) Kibbee clarifies the matter of ambiguity by dividing discriminatory treatments into two categories: disparate treatment and disparate impact. Disparate treatment is done with discriminatory intent, while disparate impact is a discriminatory effect resulting from some practice or policy seemingly unrelated to

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\(^\text{12}\) The UN Human Rights Committee makes it clear that language is one of the primary bases of discrimination as follows: “[T]he term ‘discrimination’ as used in the Covenant should be understood to imply any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which is based on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms.” See UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), "CCPR General Comment No. 18: Non-Discrimination", UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) http://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fa8.html (accessed July 21, 1989).

\(^\text{13}\) Oh: 837.


discrimination. He insists that the range of discriminatory acts in both intent and/or impact is broad and infinite, and it is extremely hard to prove when language is involved.

The difference in the dominant language is often recognized by the way people speak, that is, their accent or manner of speaking. Historically, discrimination based on accent has occurred in diverse forms. We can find examples even in the Bible. The narrative in Judges 12 is one of them. In the scripture Jephthah, a Judge, called the men of Gilead and fought against the Ephraimites due to the debate regarding the war against the Ammonites. The army of Jephthah struck down the men of Ephraim, and killed even runaway troops. The Gileadites singled out Ephraimites by their accent. The passage records the situation like this: “Whenever one of the fugitives of Ephraim said, ‘Let me go over,’ the men of Gilead would say to him . . . ‘Then say Shibboleth,’ and he said, ‘Sibboleth,’ for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and killed him.” This story is an example illustrating how difference of accent has been used as a means for discrimination, oppression, or even genocide for a long time.

In today’s multicultural societies formed by massive migration, the non-native accent is still the target of various stereotypes, depreciation, and unfairness. For instance, people might assume that non-native speakers are less educated, less competent, less professional and less attractive. As a result, those with foreign accents tend to be easily underestimated and disadvantaged especially when they seek a job or a promotion. Beatrice Bich-Dao Nguyen researched the matter of accent discrimination at work in the US. She maintains that many non-native English speaking migrants, white-collar professionals or blue-collar laborers, have suffered from overt or covert adverse treatment based on their accents, which had a bad influence on their psychological and/or occupational well-being in the new land. The research of Anne-Sophie Deprez-Sims and Scott Morris also reveals how important applicants’ accents are in job interviews in America. Stephanie Lindemann studied native English speakers’ perception of foreign accent and her research shows that foreign English accents are hierarchised by the majority’s judgement on race, culture or region. For example, Western European accents were regarded as more friendly and pleasant to listen to than Asian

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17 Ibid., 6.


or Eastern European ones. Lindemann reports that those responses were closely connected to participants’ bias toward race, country, region, or culture. Likewise, language inequality is a very complicated issue and intertwined with other discriminatory stereotypes and prejudices.

Alexander Duchêne, Melissa Moyer and Celia Roberts made a further step in investigating the dynamic relationship between language and equality focusing on the language ideology of institutions and workplaces. Language ideologies are conceptions about language that speakers have in the society or community. For them, institutions and workplaces are “realms where the daily lives of migrants are regimented and controlled.” They argue that language is used as a means of power across and beyond workplaces for selection, control and manipulation of non-native English speakers. In this process, the operation of language is closely intertwined with institutional ideologies or identity. The processes of exclusion are based on a person’s linguistic competence, but they are greatly influenced by the linguistic ideology of institutions and workplaces. They claim that linguistic discriminations that occurred in institutions and workplaces are ideological practices as follows:

This is carried out through the economic value and exchange or the commodification of language and identity, the hierarchisation of languages or the (non)-recognition of crucial multilingual practices. So, these environments can be called ‘ideological sites’ – ‘institutional sites of social practice as both object and modality of ideological


26 Churches are one of those institutions/workplaces that control and regiment new comers in many ways. Duchêne, Moyer, and Roberts, Language, Migration and Social Inequalities, 1.

27 Ibid., 2-4.
expression. In such sites, for example, the job selection interview, the talk and text is both ideologically framed and also functions to defend and (re)produce existing ideologies of power.\textsuperscript{28}

Their insights reveal clearly that linguistic discrimination is a matter of structural and ideological inequality and exclusion, which is the essence of the problem. However, in many cases, ethnic minorities are easily demanded to regard the language issue as a personal problem and to focus on the self to improve their linguistic abilities such as fluency and accent. They are also normally expected to make their attitude and behavior fit the norms of particular institutions. This advice or criticism is most likely to perpetuate the discriminatory culture and legitimate the privileges of native speakers.\textsuperscript{29} Of course, improving linguistic competence and understanding institutional norms are crucial for individual migrants to work properly and contribute fruitfully in their workplaces, but if the dynamic is limited only to personal dimension, the problem of linguistic inequality will remain a blind spot hidden by its taken-for-grantedness and transparency. Thus, conceptualizing the structures and ideologies of language inequality within particular organizations should be the first step in overcoming the invisible injustice. Pool contends, “Conceptualizing an injustice helps measure it; measuring it helps prove it; and proving it helps redress it. So, clarifying ‘linguistic inequality’ may make linguistic equality easier to achieve.”\textsuperscript{30}

Language and Equality within the Uniting Church in Australia

How do UCA people think or feel about the matter of language and fairness within the church? At the question of the level of linguistic inequality within the UCA, eleven respondents said that they had felt the level of linguistic inequality within the UCA is serious (7-10 out of 10), and five answered that we need continual attention to the issue (5-6 out of 10). Rachel, a 39-year-old non-native speaker, said that the English-only culture in the church has sometimes made her feel incompetent or inferior.\textsuperscript{31} Matthew, a 59-year-old non-native speaker, maintained that language discrimination within the church still happens in a very subtle way.\textsuperscript{32} Ron, a 55-year-old native speaker, experienced that many of non-English-speaking people are suffering from feelings of disempowerment, uncertainty and discomfort.\textsuperscript{33} Michael, a 52-year-old non-native speaker, had also experienced linguistic inequality within the UCA, but he felt it was not necessarily a problem nor a barrier because the language was never designed for equality. For better communication, he argued, ethnic minorities as well as native speakers must have willingness to listen and understand each other.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 10-11.
\textsuperscript{30} Pool: 6.
\textsuperscript{31} Rachel, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 26, 2018.
\textsuperscript{32} Matthew, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, Aug 1, 2018.
\textsuperscript{33} Ron, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 27, 2018.
\textsuperscript{34} Michael, interviewed by author, Victoria, Melbourne, August 4, 2018.
It is noted that many interview participants connected the issue of language to the current white-dominant leadership in the church. Jenny, a 60-year-old native speaker, reckoned that linguistic inequality exists in the UCA especially when it comes to leadership and decision making processes.\(^{35}\) Ian, a 56-year-old non-native speaker, claimed that English proficiency has been as a significant gatekeeper in the selection of the UCA leadership.\(^{36}\) Ted, a 49-year-old native speaker, argued that people with a non-mainstream use of English had been excluded from policy-making groups and denominational leadership.\(^{37}\) However, Michael asserted that it is not only the problem of language, but also the inability of migrants to fulfill the tasks that the position demands.\(^{38}\) Robert, a 64-year-old non-native speaker, mentioned the indifference of the CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities to the governance and polity of the UCA as another reason for the white-led leadership.\(^{39}\) Jenny said that language proficiency is inevitable in the selection of church leaders, but a countermeasure is needed for a certain number of non-native English speakers to join and be a voice in the leadership group.\(^{40}\)

Most respondents thought that linguistic inequality is directly connected to other discriminations and prejudices within the Anglo-European centered culture. Dianne, a 58-year-old non-native speaker, claimed that linguistic inequality is not only about the matter of language but also about the white-dominant culture.\(^{41}\) Ian argued that the real issue behind linguistic inequality is race discrimination within the church.\(^{42}\) Steve, a 45-year-old native speaker, agreed that linguistic inequality is far more complicated than just language. He claimed that “the deeper issues are around entitlement, institutional structure and power given to people who understand management, governance and polity.”\(^{43}\) Ted’s sharing of his linguistic inequality experience was surprising to me. Ted is a native English-speaking person, but he thought that he was discriminated against his use of Aboriginal English. He said, “My language is what you might call ‘low-registered’ Aboriginal English. I think my use of it has excluded me from many ministry opportunities.”\(^{44}\) Ted’s story reveals that linguistic inequality within the UCA is not just the matter of accents or limited expressions, but seems to be intertwined with the white normativity of the church.\(^{45}\)

\(^{35}\) Jenny, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 27, 2018.

\(^{36}\) Ian, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 27, 2018.

\(^{37}\) Ted, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 20, 2018.

\(^{38}\) Michael, interview.

\(^{39}\) Robert, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, August 1 2018.

\(^{40}\) Jenny, interview.

\(^{41}\) Dianne, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, August 6, 2018.

\(^{42}\) Ian, interview.

\(^{43}\) Steve, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 28, 2018.

\(^{44}\) Ted, interview.

\(^{45}\) About discrimination within the UCA, some of the interview participants shared their experiences of disparate treatment or impact, and others told stories of their friends or colleagues. For instance, James, a 48-year-old non-native speaker, shared his story about
The experiences of the two candidate respondents about language and equality at the UCA’s theological school might be another example showing the correlation between linguistic inequality and white normativity within the church. One of them (Cand.A) provided a story that a professor told ethnic candidates not to use their ethnic languages at school as it could exclude English-speaking people. However, Cand.A said that it would be native speakers who exclude ethnic candidates by speaking too fast, using unfamiliar slang or idioms, showing an impatient attitude toward broken English or easily ignoring different theological perspectives. Another candidate (Cand.B) has felt uncomfortable whenever talking to other English-speaking candidates due to her language incompetence; for Cand.B it was hard to feel a sense of companionship from native speakers. Their experiences were not new; other ethnic ministers who completed the candidate course shared similar feelings that they had at school. We cannot generalize their feelings, but their experiences could be significant indicators to the English-only and white-European dominant culture of the UCA’s theological training, in which the white-centered structure and leadership of the UCA seem to begin to form.

Many respondents believed that the white dominance and normativity of the UCA is a by-product of its white-centered theology. It is noted that some connected its Anglo-European theology to colonial theology. Margaret, a 55-year-old native speaker, diagnosed that many linguistic or cultural prejudices and stereotypes found in the church seem to be related to white colonial ideology. As an example of the colonial theological marks in the UCA, Judy, a 58-year-old non-native speaker, mentioned that there are still theological stereotypes or generalization toward ethnic migrants in the church; for instance, many Anglo-European leaders and members tend to view migrant communities as conservative or fundamental. Peter, a 58 year-old non-native speaker, also insisted that one of the key factors for the UCA’s white-dominant culture is its Anglo-European theological approach. He thought it urgent to change its white-centered theology to facilitate multiculturalism within the church.

The issue of colonial theology in the UCA is a controversial topic. There would be huge disagreement about whether its theological approach is still colonial or how its colonial theological marks have been expressed in the church life. To address those issues is beyond the experience he had in his placement regarding his cultural costume; one member said to him that he should wear Australian clothes in Australia. Judy shared a story of one of her ethnic colleagues who was excluded from leading a church member’s funeral service in the church by the deceased’s family. For Rachel, ethnic ministers are vulnerable to discrimination by the local community where their churches are located. See James, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 24, 2018.; Judy, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 27, 2018.; Rachel, interview.

46 To protect privacy, I will not use the candidate respondents’ gender, age, and even their pseudonyms in this paper.


49 Margaret, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 28, 2018.

50 Judy, interview.

51 Peter, interviewed by author, Victoria, Australia, July 26, 2018.
the limits of this paper. However, what is remarkable is that mentions of colonial theology in interviews seem to be connected to the matter of language ideology. A considerable number of participants believed that beliefs, feelings or ideologies about languages used in the UCA are still colonial or white-centered; for them, colonial or westernized theological concepts, languages, or ideologies are a crucial factor for white-dominant culture of the church. Their arguments are supported by Kathryn Woolard’s thinking of language ideology. She explains that language ideology is a mediating link between the beliefs about language and social/cultural systems.\(^{52}\) From the same vein, as we mentioned earlier, Duchène, Moyer and Roberts analyzed language inequality as ideological practices.\(^{53}\)

This seems a primary reason that many interviewees said that the UCA has a long way to go to be multicultural as it has declared since 1985. Margaret said that we are only just beginning to learn and name our dominant white colonial approach.\(^{54}\) Dianne contended that most influential positions are still held mainly by the dominant group in the UCA, so there are many things to progress.\(^{55}\) Steve argued that the multiculturalism of the UCA does not seem to accord with its language ideology. As a result, many different terms regarding multicultural ministry, such as ‘multicultural,’ ‘crosscultural,’ and ‘intercultural,’ have been used inconsistently, which have confused the church. He asserted, “Multicultural ministry in the UCA is still seen as tokenism rather than an essential part of the witness and life of the church.”\(^{56}\) From the same perspective, Ted defined the UCA as a rhetorical church that means that its practices are different from its statements. For him, its language ideology about equality, justice, or inclusivity is still white-European.\(^{57}\)

**Language Ideology of the Uniting Church in Australia**

Then, how can the UCA be a culturally and linguistically equal community rather than being a rhetorical church? How can its multiculturalism be a channel for creating a brave space, not just a political slogan? These are big questions and there are lots of things to be discussed. Considering the limits of this article, I will focus on exploring the language ideology of the UCA behind its white-dominant culture and structure causing linguistic inequality. Conceptualizing its language ideology could be a significant step for developing the church to be more inclusive and multicultural. For this, I will investigate the UCA’s identity described in two important documents from a socio-linguistic perspective.

First, we need to explore the *Basis of Union (BoU)*, the platform for the historic union of the three different denominations – the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. The document is still the pivot of the UCA’s identity, governance and polity. Then,


\(^{54}\) Margaret, interview.

\(^{55}\) Dianne, interview.

\(^{56}\) Steve, interview.

\(^{57}\) Ted, interview.
how does the *Basis of Union* define the UCA? The BoU makes it clear that the UCA pursues “living and working within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” And, it defines the church as “a pilgrim people (who) are on the way towards a promised goal.” In the last paragraph, the BoU equates the pilgrim people with the people of God on the journey of faith. Unfortunately, except for these mentions, there is no further explanation of who the pilgrim people are in the document. However, considering that the BoU was written on the rich heritages of the three Anglo-Celtic Churches, it would not be hard to assume that the church as a pilgrim people here means the Anglo-European. For its theological concepts and languages are deeply rooted in Anglo-European thoughts, which have formed a certain ideology and identity for the UCA.

We can take what Davis McCaughey mentioned on the BoU as an example of it. In 1994 at a lecture of the formation of the document McCaughey, the first president of the UCA and a principal author of the BoU, revisited the document focusing on its language. He argued that the BoU “invites us to learn a certain language, the language or languages in which faith has been passed on from generation to generation.” For an instance of that language, he talked about the literate tradition of the church emphasized in the document, in which religious experience is little mentioned. At this, the literate tradition Davis referred to is the Anglo-European literate tradition based on the early creeds of the church. Investigating the whole document from the perspective of language ideology is beyond the scope of this article, but the fact that its concepts and languages are based on the Anglo-European heritages provides us a significant clue to the language ideology of the UCA.

Furthermore, given that the text was written and finalized during the period of the *White Australia Policy*, a revision of the BoU should be seriously considered to clarify its

58 Basis of Union: Being the Final Revision Prepared by the Joint Commission on Church Union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, paragraph 2.

59 Ibid., paragraph 3.

60 Ibid., paragraph 18.

61 Kari Gibson has provided a critical analysis of how language and identity are related. For her, identity formation cannot be separated from language use. She argued that “Language – both code and content – is a complicated dance between internal and external interpretations of our identity.” See Kari Gibson, "English Only Court Cases Involving the U.S. Workplace: The Myths of Language Use and the Homogenization of Bilingual Workers' Identities," *Second Language Studies* 22(2), Spring 2004 (2004): 1.


63 Ibid.

identity as a multicultural church. The first revision was made in 1992 with the desire of incorporating gender-inclusive language, while a second revision looks necessary for using culture-inclusive language and developing its own multicultural theology. The revision of the document would need lots of researches and discussions, but it is in the spirit of the BoU to keep revising the document to be suitable for the changing church. McCaughey said that the BoU ends “with a prayer for correction,” which means that it is always open to being reassessed and reshaped. He even claimed that being a member of the UCA is to raise questions of the Basis of Union continually with the eyes of an insider as well as an outsider; an insider’s question would be ‘What did it and what does it mean?’, while ‘Is it true?’ is from an outsider’s perspective.

In this respect, the new vision of the Vic/Tas Synod of the UCA is remarkable in that it made a further step to provide a clearer identity of the church as a pilgrim people. The vision statement adopted by the Vic/Tas Synod in 2016 is as follows:

- Following Christ,
- walking together
- as First and Second Peoples,
- seeking community, compassion
- and justice for all creation.

This statement highlights the nomadic life and vocation of a pilgrim people through three verbs, ‘following,’ ‘walking,’ and ‘seeking,’ which again confirm the UCA’s identity as a pilgrim people. Especially, the expression, ‘walking together as First and Second Peoples,’ is noteworthy. It acknowledges the right and sovereignty of the Indigenous peoples – Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders – through the terminology First Peoples. By focusing on the act, walking together, the vision emphasizes reconciliation with one another. However, unfortunately, there is no further account of Second Peoples; who are they? The paper of theological reflection on the vision also does not explain exactly who Second Peoples are. The reflection seems to equate Second Peoples with Anglo-European settlers and their descendants. It says, “We feel the weight of history and injustice between First and

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66 McCaughey, 13.

67 Ibid., 18-19. Norman Young also maintained that the church must be ready to be regenerated in the changing contexts constantly asking questions like, “Are we facing the world or just facing one another?; Are those who value the traditions of the past and cherish them equally prepared to confess the Faith afresh in the present?” See Young: 294-5.


69 Ibid., 10.
Second Peoples crying out for attention, “” and it looks to be written from the Anglo-European perspective. For the relationship between the Indigenous people and ethnic migrants and/or refugees is entirely different. At this point, we can find another clue to the language ideology of the UCA.

In that vision, where can migrants and refugees stand? How would ethnic minority people walk together with First Peoples? How would they voice the journey of reconciliation in this land with their particular status? The new vision statement, and its information and theological reflection are silent on these questions as if ethnic communities do not exist within the church. In this regard, Judy criticized the notion of Second Peoples in the vision as follows:

The linguistically diverse communities are placed together with the Anglo (dominant culture) to confess and lament the burden of Australian History – the colonisation of the past, the stolen generation, the lack of recognition of First People as citizens, the Sovereignty of the First People, the Covenant with the First People; yet I believe new and emerging migrants know little the fullness of the Australian history. I believe the migrant communities walking with First People may look different, because we know what it is like to be colonised. . . .

How would the migrant communities have a voice in what it means to walk together with the First People? The Second People for me lumps everyone – Historical colonizers with recent migrants (different lived experiences); yet appears to be ‘pained’ with the same brush. Although the vision may look great on paper, the reality is the migrant voices are limited or never enacted.  

Peter also mentioned that the concept of Second Peoples in the vision statement disadvantages migrants and refugees. From his point of view, the terminology should be revisited and clarified more holistically, so that the culturally and linguistically diverse communities within the church may also be recognized and properly voiced. Then, how should we define the term Second Peoples? Finding a right meaning is not just the matter of definition, but a significant step for overcoming the white-dominant culture and structure of the UCA. For the way the words are used might perpetuate white normativity or weaken it within the church. For this, I propose a biblical concept, gēr / gērîm, to describe the concept of Second Peoples inclusively.

A Comprehensive Identity: Second Peoples as gēr / gērîm

In the Old Testament the term gēr (singular form) and gērîm (plural form) are found in various books. These concepts signify migrant(s), refugee(s), sojourner(s) or outsider(s) leaving or being uprooted from their hometowns. According to Sungjae Kim, gēr and gērîm

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70 Geoff Thompson and John Flett, *Theological Reflections on the Vision and Mission Principles* (Melbourne, AUS: Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, 2016), 2, Meeting paper at Major Strategic Review.

71 Judy, interview.

72 Peter, interview.
were used 92 times and gûr, their verbal form, was used 81 times in the Hebrew Bible. Kim analyzed how these notions were related to the identity of the Israelite people and their traditions of social justice through a story from the Hezekian regime. According to historical and archaeological research findings, the population in Jerusalem rapidly expanded during the reign of Hezekiah in the late 8th century due to the mass immigration caused by the Assyrian invasion. As a result, there were social tensions and conflicts between native people and newcomers in the city of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah faced a big problem in how to deal with it, and finally decided to accept all migrants and refugees by declaring in Exodus 22:21: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

At this sentence, the Hebrew word translated into ‘a resident alien’ is gûr, while the original word translated into ‘aliens’ is gērîm. It is remarkable that there are two different usages of you in the text. The first ‘you’ is singular along with gûr and the second ‘you’ is plural like gērîm, which shows the expansion of the first ‘you.’ The first ‘you’ means native Israelites living in Jerusalem, and in the second ‘you’ native people are connected with strangers as migrants (gērîm). What made this identity extension? From the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Israelite people were migrants or sojourners in the land of Canaan and Egypt; this fact made “a comprehensive identity” to embrace strangers as their neighbours. Kim interpreted this story as follows:

[The gûr / gērîm] text articulates a theological paradigm to encouraging ethic of co-habitation between natives and aliens on the same space through prompting remembrance of historical and existential memory as gûr / gērîm inscribed in self-selves. Remembrance of self/selves as gûr / gērîm leads to ethic of loving aliens like self/selves. In other words, it is the concept of gûr / gērîm that transforms land into cohabitant space for people within and without border.

Likewise, identity as gûr / gērîm of the Israel people was a channel for creating a space of co-habitation or co-existence in which reconciliation between natives and strangers took place. This story gives us an insight into how to overcome the white-dominant culture within the church; as the Israel people did, we must remember we were/are all migrants, refugees, or sojourners. Historically, except for the Indigenous Peoples, all Second Peoples in Australia are migrants or migrants’ descendants whether they are in the majority or minority. Thus, the passage of Exodus 22:21 is not only applied to the Israelites, but also for us all. This scripture shows well our identity and responsibility that we must remember. So, I suggest that the concept of Second Peoples in the vision of the Vic/Tas Synod needs to contain that comprehensive identity as migrants (gērîm).

The information booklet for the Vision and Mission Principles published by the Vic/Tas Synod explains the part of ‘Walking Together as First and Second Peoples’ as

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75 Kim: 41-42.

76 Ibid., 37-42.

77 Ibid., 42.
follows: “Walking together speaks of the hope we have for reconciliation with God, and with one another, that we might experience fullness of life lived in companionship.”

It says that ‘experiencing fullness of life lived in companionship’ is a result or a purpose in walking together. However, a sense of companionship is a critical condition for walking together and reconciliation. How can we walk together or be reconciled to each other without a sense of companionship? And, how can we develop a sense of friendship if we are segregated or categorized racially, culturally, or linguistically? If we cannot share a comprehensive identity, it will be extremely hard to walk together with a sense of companionship. As a result, the vision might become another rhetorical statement. Thus, to confess that we were/are all migrants is essential. When we walk together as Second Peoples as migrants (gērîm), true friendship and reconciliation might occur between all Second Peoples. Then, all Second Peoples can be connected rather than being segregated or hierarchised; and then, ethnic minorities can nurture a sense of companionship and find a space to collaborate together. This reconciliation between Second Peoples will have a positive impact on the relationship with First Peoples.

What is remarkable is that forming a comprehensive identity as migrants needs an intentional effort to depart from our own culture and re-define the self. Miroslav Volf accounts for this effort as the process of de-centering and re-centering. What is the process of de-centering and re-centering? He takes Galatians 2:19-20 as an example showing the process: “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Here, the Apostle Paul is trying to re-centre himself in Christ so as to have a new center by being de-centered through being crucified with Christ. In this process, de-centering happens first, that is, being nailed to the cross, and then re-centering will follow and create a new centre. Volf names this new centre as “a de-centered center.” For him, the process of de-centering and re-centering is the way to accept others, which is the core mission of Christians. Identifying ourselves as migrants (gērîm) is a de-centering act, through which we can find a de-centered center, a space in which we are equal, respected, and recognized in Christ.

At this point, we must remember that not only the majority but also minorities should de-center and re-center themselves constantly as many ethnic people have also been colonized historically or socially and have tended to judge others from that perspective. For example, Matthew shared that he grew up in a colonized society, in which people were likely to rate others according to their skin colour or English competency. He had to train himself to break the colonial mindset. The de-centering and re-centering acts will provide us with a

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81 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 70-71. Volf argues that the de-centering is the flip side of re-centering.

82 Matthew, interview. A number of non-Anglo respondents also said that sometimes they feel superior to those speaking English poorly. Michael’s sharing was an example of it. He said that he received more unfair and discriminatory treatment from his non-English speaking colleagues than Anglo ones. His experiences looked to be an effect
catholic cultural identity. For Volf, catholic cultural identity is recognition that a stable cultural ‘we’ is intertwined with a stable cultural ‘them’ by a common destiny, so should cooperate for creating a space to walk and thrive together.\textsuperscript{83} He explains catholic cultural identity as follows:

The distance from our own culture [de-centering] . . . loosen the grip of our culture on us and enable us to live with its fluidity and affirm its hybridity. Other cultures are not a threat to the pristine purity of our cultural identity, but a potential source of its enrichment. Inhabited by people who are courageous enough not simply to belong, intersecting and overlapping cultures can mutually contribute to the dynamic vitality of each.\textsuperscript{84}

Conclusion

Linguistic inequality is far more complex than just the matter of language; it is ideological expressions directly intertwined with institutional identity. The white dominance and normativity found in the UCA cannot be separated from its identity and language ideology. In this article I have explored the UCA’s identity, the church as a pilgrim people, with a socio-linguistic perspective, and found that its language use is still Anglo-European dominant. This white-centered identity and language ideology, whether they are still colonial as some respondents argued or not, have made diverse barriers to equality and fairness within the church consciously or unconsciously. If we keep regarding this structural and ideological issue just as personal and linguistic problems, a real multicultural space cannot be created in us. Thus, we must recognize how language is used within the UCA and try to transform its language usage to be more intercultural and inclusive. As a concrete way we need to comprehensively expand our identity to embrace all races and cultures. For this, I suggested the concept of Second Peoples as migrants (gērîm).

It is extremely hard to change the structure and system of an institution and it is even harder to transform its culture and the way it has operated. However, as Robert claimed, we should keep raising our voices and making efforts together to (re)fashion the UCA to be braver and safer for all people before God.\textsuperscript{85} I hope this paper will be pump-priming for further research for this challenging journey. In this process, the role of religious education seems critical as it should continually educate people to recognize invisible inequality within the church, to form a comprehensive identity as migrants, and to encourage people to develop multicultural ways of theology and ministry.

\textsuperscript{83} On the contrary, cultural identity is to divide ‘we’ and ‘them.’ As a result, in spite of their mutual relationship, it is so difficult to feel a sense of belonging and companionship from each other. See Volf, \textit{Exclusion and Embrace}, 51-52.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{85} Robert, interview.
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