ABSTRACT

This paper looks at different interpretations of the 1962 Treaty of Friendship between New Zealand and Samoa, to uncover possible sources of misunderstanding between the two nation states.

The 1962 Treaty of Friendship marked the independence of Samoa from New Zealand. Unlike most international treaties of friendship, the NZ/Samoan treaty was written in the languages of both of the signatories, with both languages, English and Samoan, designated as ‘equally authentic’. In addition, the wording of this treaty differed from most international treaties in that the language of human rights and egalitarianism was used, rather than the previous terminology associated with the Treaty of Westphalia.

However, a comparative linguistic analysis reveals that, while the English version uses the language of contract and human rights, the Samoan version uses the concept of covenant and the language of Christianity and spirituality. We argue that difference in language helps to explain some of the differences in importance accorded to the Treaty in New Zealand and Samoa.