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## SIL RESEARCH IN NEW GUINEA

### Historical

The Summer Institute of Linguistics was founded by William Cameron Townsend who is currently the General Director. Having struggled to translate the New Testament into the Cakchiquel language of Guatemala, he was impressed with the assistance that a knowledge of descriptive linguistics would have been to him, so in 1934 he started a training school at a farmhouse in the Ozarks of Arkansas. The first school had only two students and gave training in beginning linguistic principles and in how to handle the problems of travelling, living and working in primitive situations. Two notable students at succeeding schools in those early years were Kenneth Pike in 1935, and Eugene Nida, now of the American Bible Society, in 1936.

In 1942 an invitation came from the University of Oklahoma to conduct the summer courses on its campus. This began a long association with the University which has continued until the present day. The University makes accommodation and classrooms available, and allows credit towards degrees to students who successfully complete the courses. The Institute conducts the schools supplying all administrative and teaching staff. Since that time, other linguistic summer schools have been established by the Institute at the Universities of North Dakota and Washington in the United States, and in England, Germany, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1935 the first members of SIL began work with the

larger language groups in Mexico. In 1944 work began in the United States, and then in later years in Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador, Philippines, Bolivia, Canada, New Guinea, Brazil, Viet Nam, Australia, Honduras, Ghana, Colombia, Nigeria, India, Nepal, and most recently, in Surinam.

### Aims

The overall aims of the organisation are several.

1. Linguistic study of specific languages.
2. Anthropological study of specific cultures.
3. Promotion of literacy, especially in the vernacular.
4. Translation of the Scriptures and other materials.
5. Encouragement of the social and economic development of the specific groups studied.

Members of the Institute have, over the years, made a considerable contribution both to linguistic theory, and to the knowledge of many of the lesser known languages. They have been active in the field of graduate studies and have made important contributions in Anthropology, in Literacy and Translation theory, and in Comparative and Historical studies as well as in Descriptive Linguistics. Kenneth Pike, the president of SIL, has been president of the Linguistic Society of America and has written several important linguistic books, as well as numerous shorter papers, and in conjunction with Pickett, Elson, Longacre and others, has pioneered the development of the Tagmemic model of language description, which is one of the major current theories of language.

### New Guinea

Work began first in New Guinea late in 1956 with

the establishment of a base of operations at Ukarumpa near Aiyura in the Eastern Highlands. The normal approach is to assign a team of two people to work on a given language and study it in depth. The first such team began working in this way with the Tairora language near Aiyura in the Kainantu sub-district in mid 1957. Since that time the number of languages being studied has grown to 75. These 75 languages are found in all the Administrative Districts with the exception of New Britain, New Ireland, Manus, the Gulf and Central Districts. It is anticipated that eventually we will have teams working in many more languages in every District. Progress at present varies from the merest beginnings as for example in Mountain Arapesh in the Maprik area, where the team has only just arrived, to rather complete analysis and description including some comparative studies, as is the case with Usarufa in the Eastern Highlands, where the team began work in 1958, and one member has recently completed a grammar of Usarufa as a doctoral dissertation at Indiana University. Apart from these 75 languages, members have made brief studies of a few other languages upon special request from the Administration or Missions.

### Method of Study

When a team is assigned to work with a given language, it is with the idea that they will spend a number of years studying that language, and they are given a series of goals which they are expected to complete at various intervals. A Linguistic Committee of five Departments (Anthropology, Grammar, Phonemics, Literacy, and Translation) supervises the work of the teams, seeking to maintain good quality in the work produced, giving help

where needed, and assisting members to publish the results of their studies.

The primary goal of all teams, especially in the first months, is to acquire fluency in the language assigned to them. At the same time analysis commences, concentrating on phonology at first. Teams are expected to write up the results of their analysis and to present it to the appropriate department of the Linguistic Committee for approval.

As a result of their phonological studies, the team proposes an orthography for the language. As the phonological structure becomes clearer, more and more time is given to grammatical analysis, the final aim being at least a comprehensive sketch of the grammar of the language. Concurrently with all these studies, the team is observing and describing the culture of the particular people from an anthropological point of view, as well as building up a file of dictionary entries, and preparing for literacy and translation.

Something of the scope of the material produced by members of the Institute is shown by the Bibliography of Linguistics and Anthropology prepared by the Linguistic Committee in 1966, and which it is proposed to revise biennially. It will be noticed that a great deal of the material listed is still in typescript, but it is hoped to be able to get more and more of this and subsequent material into print in order that it might be more readily available to scholars and other interested people.

## Workshop Programmes

Members sometimes find their progress slowed down as they strive to analyse the various aspects of the structure of particular languages. To help them to quickly master unusual or difficult features and to guide them in writing up their materials, a system of workshops has been developed. These workshops range in length from three weeks to three months, and are under the direction of linguistic consultants who have had wider experience, and usually, who have undertaken post-graduate studies in linguistics or associated disciplines. Workshops vary in their emphasis and purpose as well as in their duration. Some may concentrate specifically on Phonology, others on Grammar, others again on Anthropology, Literacy or Translation. They may be aimed at problem solving, or at the editing of papers for publication. Non-members are often invited to participate in these workshops when they are likely to be of wider interest.

## Literacy and Translation

As the team's understanding of the language increases, they prepare literacy materials, primers, and readers, and actively promote literacy in the vernacular by holding classes and training teachers. Some Local Government Councils have sponsored vernacular literacy campaigns in their areas already, and it is hoped that more may be willing to take advantage of this opportunity in the future. Although it is desirable for indigenous peoples here and elsewhere to speak, read and write the national language of their country, long experience has shown that the most effective means of communication with any people is through their native tongue. Not only this, but it has been clearly demonstrated that

ability to read and write the vernacular increases the desire to learn to read and write the national language, and also greatly speeds and simplifies the acquisition of these skills.

At the same time as the team promotes literacy, they also begin the task of translation of the Scriptures, as well as supplementary materials relating to health, agriculture, social studies, government and other subjects designed to broaden the general knowledge and educational background of the people.

### Other Projects

Other projects of interest include the preparation of vocabularies and dictionaries of the languages, and of language learning lessons. Several sets of such language learning lessons have been prepared at the request of the Administration, and published by the Department of Information and Extension Services. A current project of this type but of more general interest is the preparation of a course in Neomelanesian (Pidgin English). This has been designed using some of the techniques of programmed learning and is to be used in conjunction with a set of tapes in a more integrated way than has been the case with earlier courses.

Apart from the work of individual members on specific languages, some other current projects should also be mentioned.

In the past the Institute has carried out language surveys of certain specified regions for the Administration which has undertaken publication of them. We now wish to coordinate and extend these surveys in order to give a complete linguistic picture of the whole of Papua and New Guinea.

Due to lack of finance and personnel this rather long range project has not developed very far, but it is an attempt to fill a real gap in our knowledge of the Territory. Some work has been done already on this, apart from the surveys requested by the Administration. A survey was carried out on New Ireland, the results of which are ready for publication. Early in 1967 a survey was carried out along the tributaries south of the Sepik River. This has led to the establishment of the Sepik Hill Family of languages, hitherto unknown. Work is also being carried out in the Morobe District, which although one of the areas of earliest European contact, still has not been adequately described from a linguistic point of view. A large part of the information for this survey is already gathered, but a few areas still need to be visited.

In conjunction with the survey project, but somewhat distinct from it is the Word List File which has been set up. Whenever possible, members all over the Territory record word lists in their own and other languages. These lists are both written and recorded on tape, and are filed at Ukarumpa for reference. We plan to continue expanding this file as opportunities present themselves.

Members of the Institute studying the various languages have a unique opportunity to collect cultural materials of various kinds. This is particularly true of myths, legends and folklore. While collected primarily as a basis for linguistic analysis, these folkstories are of some interest to anthropologists and folklorists. One of our members is now editing a volume of origin stories of

this type collected from several different groups around the Territory.

One other area of study which has been largely neglected in the Territory is the study of native music. Some of our members with training in this field have taken an active interest in collecting, preserving, and analysing the different musical forms and styles used in the Territory, and already several papers are in print describing the music of different groups. A catalogue of musical instruments used in the Territory has just been completed and submitted for publication.

To sum up, the Institute desires to continue its programme of linguistic and anthropological research in Papua and New Guinea, as well as pursuing its goals of literacy and translation aimed at broadening and deepening the educational standards of the people as well as their spiritual insight. We aim to publish as much of the information gained from our work as possible in order to make it available to others who might be interested.