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THE (MIS)FORTUNES OF VERNACULAR LITERACY IN THE HULI LANGUAGE OF THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE (SHP)

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ABSTRACT
This article[1] traces the historical development of vernacular literacy in the Huli language of the Southern Highlands (now Hela) Province,[2] with a particular focus on the work of the Asia Pacific Christian Mission and subsequently the indigenous Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea, though reference will be made to other NGOs in the language group. It highlights both positive and negative factors which caused both success and decline in the historical period from the introduction of vernacular literacy to the present, factors such as orthography, motivation, the place of the Huli scriptures and other printed matter, the influence of education in English and the prestige attributed to both English and Pidgin; and will conclude with a comment on the current status and prospects of vernacular literacy in the Elementary Schools.

KEY WORDS: Huli language / vernacular literacy / NGOs / Missions/ APCM / ECPNG / literacy decline

INTRODUCTION

This article outlines the development and decline of a vernacular literacy programme in the Huli language. It delineates the three phases of development, and the fourth stage, a stage of declension. It highlights both positive and negative factors which caused both success and decline in the historical period from the commencement to the present, factors such as orthography, motivation, the place of the Huli Scriptures and other printed matter, the influence of education in English and the influence and use of Pidgin; and will conclude with a comment on the current status and prospects of vernacular literacy in the Elementary Schools.

But before launching into discussion, it is necessary to give some background setting and context against which to understand it: demographic information on the Huli and the type of mission (and missionaries) who were instrumental in developing literacy amongst the Huli.

THE HULI

The Huli language group currently numbers at least 150,000 speakers, probably closer to 200,000[3] - though at the time of initial contact estimated at less than half that number (Glasse 1968:18) - and

traditionally inhabiting the intra-montane valleys and slopes of the Tagali River drainage system at an altitude of between 4500 and 6500 feet towards the north-western end of the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. Although a number of exploratory patrols had traversed the area in the mid- to late 1930s, the intervention of World War II delayed the setting up of an administrative patrol post and the construction of an air-field until 1952. During the initial phases of pacification by the Australian administration's patrol officers, missionaries were allowed entry but were restricted to a radius of three kilometres from the patrol post at the air-field.

THE ASIA PACIFIC CHRISTIAN MISSION

The first two missionaries to enter were representatives of the Methodist Overseas Mission and the Unevangelized Fields Mission. The Unevangelized Fields Mission (UFM),[4] initially in the Western Province in 1931, and later the land of the Huli[5] in 1953 shortly after 'pacification' by the Australian colonial Administration. The mission belongs in the stream of nondenominational / interdenominational, evangelical, faith missionary organizations which arose from the mid-nineteenth century Evangelical Awakening and the formation of 'faith' missions under J. Hudson Taylor of China Inland Mission (CIM) renown. In the early 1970s the name was changed to the Asia Pacific Christian Mission (APCM). This is the name I shall use for this paper, regardless of the era.

The ethos of the Mission fits in perfectly with Bebbington's quadrilateral of characteristics of Evangelicalism (Bebbington 1989), an important one being 'biblicism'. The pioneer missionaries had all completed Bible School and the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Mission policy also mandated that missionaries become proficient in the languages of the people groups where they were located. So, together with the intense activism of demonstrating and verbally explaining the Good News of God's love in the Lord Jesus Christ using the Huli language, missionaries were intent on translating the message of the Bible and helping people to read.

During the early 1950s four major mission societies entered the Tari area: the above mentioned evangelical missions, the Catholics, and the SDAs. By the end of the 60s, the missions (APCM in particular) had made a significant impact on Huli society (Frankel 1986:33, 34); (Goldman 1981:21). Initial baptism of Christian converts took place very early in the 60s for both Evangelical missions. Recent statistics indicate a baptised adult membership of well in excess of five thousand, giving perhaps an adult adherence of eight to ten thousand in 150 local congregations within the ECPNG. Proportionately, United Church membership figures would be comparable, as would also those of the Christian Brethren Church, of the Wesleyan Church in the Koroba sub-province and, no doubt, those of

the adult component of Catholic adherence. The national census records an adherence to Christianity in the Huli area well over 90%.[6]

The year following UFM's entry into the Huli tribe, mission linguists and early teachers at the Australian Summer Institute of Linguistics, Joan and Murray Rule[7] analysed the Huli language, producing a phonology and spelling system, as well as a pedagogical grammar (1954a; 1954b). Among many other missionary activities was literacy in the Huli language. Literacy classes in the Huli language were commenced early, as was the translation of particular verses and passages from the Bible. The first New Testament book to be translated was the Gospel of Mark, a co-operative effort by APCM and Methodist missionaries, and printed by the Methodist Press in Rabaul in the early 1960s. From the mid-1960s all translated portions of Scripture were published successively by the Bible Society, the culmination being the single, bound volume of the Huli New Testament in 1983. This New Testament was received enthusiastically by many thousands of Huli Christians.[8]

The technology of literacy entered Huli society with the duties of both the Australian Administration's Patrol Officers and the missionaries, because it was an integral part of the western way of doing things. Specific instruction in literacy in Huli for the Huli, however, commenced with the Evangelical missions in an informal way along with the instruction of groups of interested inquirers of the Christian message. Instruction remained semi-formal as Huli evangelist-teachers itinerated or shared the things that they had been learning with their own kin. It progressively became more structured in classes for converts and baptismal candidates as they memorized Bible verses and learnt Bible stories. Literacy instruction, as with other oral instruction, was in the Huli language.

THE NATIONAL SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

During the early years of establishing a mission presence and work amongst the Huli missionaries of mission societies felt the pressure of the Australian Administration to prepare the country for self-government and nationhood. Because so little had been done in education, relatively speaking, before WW2, Australian administrators diffused the urgency of education. McCarthy declared that 'for a people to take its place in the modern world they must be taught to read and write' (McCarthy 1968:121). By this he meant both schooling and the medium of English. To him, as with others in the employ of the Australian Administration, '[i]t was clear that the Government could not achieve its plans for education without help, and so it was decided that the missions should receive grants of money which would be used for mission schools' (1968:124). It was also clear to McCarthy that it would be impossible to

provide schooling for 'the masses,' who, in his opinion, would need to remain within their traditional subsistence mode of living. It was within this ideological and framework that missions were pressured or enticed into the national education scheme.

Even in the remoter districts of the Western Province and the Southern Highlands the APCM felt the effects.

> The mission's language failures were serious enough to attract the attention of the new Area Education Officer at Daru. Many of the missionaries who argued for vernacular education were, he found, far from fluent in the vernacular themselves. Ken McKinnon, who would one day become Director of Education for Papua New Guinea, was appalled at the education situation in the Western District and resolved to do something about it. By pestering Port Moresby for teachers he started a string of government schools along the coast and in the Fly estuary. Next he started a school at Balimo's new government station, a challenge to the entrenched mission domination of Balimo which was bitterly resented. By government policy the school educated in English, calling the mission's vernacular education policy into question. (Prince 1981:126).

Not that there had been a coherent policy. Missionaries opened 'schools', sometimes in response to popular demand, but mainly to teach the reading of the Scriptures. Unfortunately few of the newer centres had any basic reading materials. Reading was taught from whatever Scriptures happened to have been translated, however difficult they might be in concept and vocabulary. Some centres began teaching the people Gogodala, so as to give access to the relatively plentiful Scriptures in that language and this tendency towards a church lingua franca was reinforced by any Christians from outlying tribes who had been trained in the Gogodala Bible School.[9]

> Ken McKinnon was infuriated by such tunnel vision. What use was Gogodala to a Zimakani or an Aekyom? The only foreign language of any value was English, which was the chosen language of education and government service. He urged the mission to get into English education and to use Alwyn Neuendorf to head up the programme. For though Neuendorf's programme was in Gogodala, McKinnon recognised its educational value. Neuendorf, now that he had finished training the pastors in the Balimo school as teachers, saw the need to move into English. When he transferred to Awaba in 1959 he started a first group on a grade 3 English programme. The majority of his colleagues felt he had been sidetracked from his spiritual call, but in fact he was leading the mission into the future (Prince 1981:125-6).

Nevertheless, under the leadership of such a self-disciplined, hard-working and visionary educator as Alwyn Neuendorf not only was an English-speaking school set up, but a teacher training college was commenced to train indigenous students to qualify as teachers in order to staff the rapidly increasing number of Mission schools (Prince 1981).

In the Huli region, pioneer missionary Alan Sinclair, an accomplished Huli-speaker, completed the special 'S course' of teacher training in 1959. By 1960 he was teaching a class of young Huli men[10] in

school in the mornings and in the afternoons supervising pit-sawing to provide timber for the building programme on the station, which included his own home. Sinclair's involvement in this school arena however was of shorter duration. The skills, nevertheless, stood him in good stead for his next educational venture – the Huli 'Bible' School.[11] Sinclair used the Huli language as medium of communication and as the language of instruction in the school. Under his tutelage these students learned to read and write the Huli vernacular.

By the middle of the decade, however, two other factors emerged which had long term implications. Those mission schools which were receiving government grants-in-aid were required to use only English in the school programmes. In addition, the Mission teacher training programme used English as the medium of instruction and produced trained teachers who conducted classes in English according to Government policy.

VERNACULAR LITERACY AMONGST THE HULI

The development of vernacular literacy, at least vernacular reading, must be seen diachronically in its historical and cultural settings, both of which were changing rapidly.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

For the sake of analysis the historical development of vernacular literacy may be divided into three major phases: the pioneering phase, the fragmentation phase, and the centralized phase. Then came a fourth phase, attrition, which succeded the third and which has motivated this analysis.

PHASE 1. THE PIONEER PHASE[12]

Huli vernacular literacy emerged in the context of Mission ideology and practice. This initial phase commenced at Walidegemabu / Halongoali soon after a number of women indicated an interest in the teachings they had heard from the missionaries. The first women missionaries, Eva Twyman, Val Sinclair and Joan Erkkila, although having a very elementary grasp of the Huli language, commenced instruction for the women in the late afternoons once or twice a week.

The reason for the classes being held only for women was two-fold. First, the missionary men were busily engaged in pit-sawing and building homes that there was little time for teaching reading. Secondly, without a male instructor, and with women in attendance, it was unthinkable that Huli men should attend classes.[13] Classes were held during the last hour of daylight, because Huli women were not free from their engagement in gardening activities and tending children and pigs. Thus, by request of the Huli women,

the classes were fitted in, without disruption to the schedule of their working day and family responsibilities.

Early instruction used a purely phonics approach and the syllable method. The syllable method did not require great language fluency skills or pedagogy skills of the instructors, nor was much material required – just a chalkboard, a chart, or flash cards. Syllables were drilled according to rhyme and family categories: syllables which commence with the same initial letter are known as 'syllable families'; these rhyme and family categories were displayed, pointed to and sounded out. The process was repeated, with occasional oral testing, until all the syllables were readily recognized by the students. At each stage, appropriate short words were built using the known syllables.

Later, primers or reading booklets[14] were produced using sentence frames, which repeated the initial sentence, substituting only one word, usually a noun. For example, 'I am going to _____' would be a sample frame. This method of designing primers was advocated at language learning courses for missionaries during the 1950s.

With the commencement of a second mission station at Walete, a similar pattern and method continued. Joan Erkkila taught classes to women while her husband Jim was engaged in sawing timber and building construction.

At this juncture an analysis is in order. Two or three aspects need attention: the pedagogical / andragogical aspect, the socio-cultural aspect, and the ideological aspect. The teaching of the literacy using the syllable method was effective only to a limited degree. For initially learning to read the text of a language with a transparent orthography[15] it is excellent for the acquisition of decoding skills. The Huli alphabet has only nineteen letters and is, as with most of the languages in PNG given an alphabet, a shallow or transparent orthography, which means direct correlation between graphemes and phonemes. But unless instruction and practice in semantic attack skills is provided as well, new readers will be so concentrating on grapho-phonic decoding, they do not even understand the words they are pronouncing. Secondly, the missionaries were sensitive to the socio-cultural context, and provided the instruction classes at times and venues which did not disrupt the daily activities of the Huli learners. Thirdly, the venue for instruction was in the new 'religious space' and was perceived to be for that specific purpose, that is, the reading of Scripture.

PHASE 2. FRAGMENTATION

During the second phase three things came into being which affected the teaching of reading. First, schools for children were commenced; and second, Val Sinclair developed a set of primer-readers based on the prevailing 'fad' of the time, the 'whole word' approach; and third, local churches were being established and other stations were opened up, including Benalia, to the south, and Malanda to the south-west.

The expansion of the 1960s occurred rapidly. The first Christians from the Halongoali parish in the Tari area were eager to share their new-found faith, and many accompanied missionaries on their evangelistic patrols. Because Hulis were communicating in the vernacular and explaining the relevance of the message in practical terms, in the newer areas there was not the lengthy period before others 'converted' to Christianity and became interested in reading. Literacy classes were established early. Village pastors exiting the Bible school had been instructed in the teaching of literacy and were expected to do so as they took up their pastoral appointments.

The commencement of schools for 'children' initially used the vernacular as the medium of instruction, and the subjects were basic – reading, writing and arithmetic. These 'children' were young men. Relatives would not allow girls to attend school, because they were needed to help with the gardening and tending the pigs. Huli culture did not allow for socializing or intermingling of the sexes, especially during the years of puberty. One of the benefits of the schools in the early period was that the young men learned to read early and were able to help teach adults. By the mid-1960s, however, it became mandatory that all instruction in schools be given in English. Non-Huli teachers were placed in classrooms, and instruction in vernacular literacy for children virtually ceased. Vernacular literacy shrank to the domain of teaching adults.

Further fragmentation emerged within the literacy programmes themselves. The districts were isolated from each other. Some chose to remain teaching the syllable method, others followed the new scheme. The new 'whole word' scheme, or the 'look-say' method came into prominence in Australia in the early 1960s, Professor Fred Schonell of the University of Queensland being the chief architect and ardent advocate in the Queensland education system. The psycho-linguistic theory undergirding this approach was simply that instantaneous recognition of whole words,[16] without the process of 'decoding', enabled learners to read sentences 'with comprehension' very early, stimulating interest and motivation.

An analysis of this period reveals that severe fragmentation of literacy instruction occurred. Geographically and socially, although still Huli, the districts were isolated from each other. Pedagogically, different methods were being used. The syllable method produced slow readers, who did not always comprehend the meaning of the text they were reading. The 'whole word' approach was inefficient in an ideal context where the language was written phonically. In addition the 'whole word' approach required much more expertise on the part of the 'instructors' if they were to attempt to carry the responsibility themselves – an expertise which they just did not have, and which the missionaries were not able to inculcate in them by courses of training. It also required much more material in the form of charts, flash cards, and readers. The production of these materials and the preparation required for classes was time consuming for the missionaries involved, and almost impossible for Huli people themselves to take on.

PHASE 3. CENTRALIZATION, UNIFICATION, & THE PRODUCTION OF EFFECTIVE MATERIALS & INSTRUCTORS

The Huli New Testament was published as a single volume 1983. During the preceding decade the oversight and supervision of the vernacular literacy programme was under the jurisdiction of a single person, one who had both fluency in Huli and educational qualifications in teaching, namely, me. Having already observed the fragmented nature of the literacy approaches in the different districts, the methods of literacy pedagogy lying at opposite poles of the spectrum, the ineffectiveness of the programmes in terms of hours needed in preparation of materials, and the lack of skilled Huli instructors, I undertook to do four things: to unify the programme; to produce printed materials that would be more efficient and effective in the context of an orthographically transparent language; to produce materials that would teach students right from the beginning that the underlying reason for literacy, like oral communication, is to convey meaning; and to educate and train instructors with suitable instructional skills to produce literates with minimal supervision, but with the needed encouragement for psychological reinforcement. The programme which was designed at this stage is outlined in one of my own documents and briefly described in non-technical terms, in the early stages of its implementation (Gould 1975). Not only did this programme effect the unification of the literacy programmes in the districts in which there were ECPNG churches, but extended, by request, to 'sister' Evangelical churches: the United Church in the Tari District, the Kristen Brata Sios at Koroba, and the Wesleyan Church at Fugwa. Not only was the aim of training skilled instructors achieved, but Huli supervisors were also trained to conduct itinerant supervisory visits of instructors and trainee instructors, but were able to conduct training courses as well.[17]

During the decade in focus, this programme became the largest and most successful vernacular literacy programme in the Southern Highlands Province. In-built into the programme was a proficiency test which had two parts: testing of reading skills (without requiring writing), and a test of writing skills. Unlike the assumption of not a few missionaries and national pastors who believed that one could gauge the literacy skill level of a reader by listening to their oral performance, the tests were designed to directly assess comprehension rather than oral production. This is because readers of a language with a transparent orthography are able to perform the 'mechanics' of reading, that is, decoding the symbols and producing the appropriate sounds without necessarily comprehending what is being 'read', not only at the sentence level, but even sometimes at the word level. The purpose of this fairly objective testing was two-fold. Firstly, it was being required of those making application for training at the Bible Training Centre that they be able to both read and write. This was a standardized and reasonably objective method of achieving that assessment. Secondly, instructors were 'rewarded' with a small amount of money only when they produced literates[18] The programme was 'goal oriented' and 'outcome focussed', a feature of much post-secondary, but non-university, training in Australia and New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century.

After only three years engagement in developing the literacy programme my complete vision was cut short by a summons to be engaged in another training programme. Nevertheless, I did continue to work on other projects related to literacy, not the least of which was to develop a pre-school literacy programme. This was in the era before the Tok Ples Pre-Schools promoted by Brian Kemelfield (Delpit and Kemelfield 1985) came into prominence on the national scene. Huli children had available to them the one year vernacular pre-school programme, and the primary school teachers spoke in glowing terms of children entering their school with developed literacy skills.

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS

Vernacular literacy for the Huli was not required in order for them either to hear the Christian message or for them to become members of the church. Christianity for the Huli commenced within a completely vernacular oral framework. Out of this oral framework emerged the 'written' biblical memory verses along with the orally memorized verses, and simple Bible stories began to be produced. These printed Bible stories were not designed for communication purposes – they had heard the stories – but for an introduction to learning to read, and, in part, 'memory joggers'. In a similar vein, the worship songs in church were learned in the oral context and memorized, and then came the production of the Church Song Book (hymnal). Literate practice appears to be complementary to the oral and in a symbiotic relationship to it.

LITERATE PRACTICE

Investigation and assessment of literate practice of the Huli has never been fully undertaken - at least, not in the way that Heath conducted her ground-breaking investigative study of three communities in the U.S.A. (Heath 1983). The only research of literacy and literate practice among the Huli was conducted by Apelis in the 1980s, during the decade in which the Huli New Testament was released as a single volume. (Apelis 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1988). That it occurred during the decade of the release of the Huli New Testament can hardly be called significant for general research on literacy, because it has a number of deficiencies, which will be discussed shortly. More significantly it was conducted during the period when the Southern Highlands Province was particularly in focus for assessing adult and non-formal literacy programmes in the attempt by many NGOs to access more finance from the Non-formal Education Unit which had been created. Reports from the Huli area indicated a strong literacy thrust and the Huli Literacy Programme under the auspices of the then ECP was asking for the 'lion's share' of the funding. So, it was fitting that a proper assessment be undertaken. While the findings and interpretation might not reach the standard of validity required for such sociological research, the research is significant, in one way, because it was undertaken at the time of the release of the Huli New Testament, the literate use of which is the central theme of this thesis. The ECP's Huli Literacy Programme had just passed its peak impact and was in decline, mainly because the Programme's supervising officer was no longer present. Nevertheless the Programme had produced thousands of literates who were anxious to procure and read their New Testament. This was the context in which the Apelis research was conducted. As a piece of sociological field work, however, it falls short and is somewhat disappointing.

The deficiencies of Apelis' research mainly fall into the category of 'validity'. Three NGO communities operating literacy were selected: The Kristen Brata Sios (KBS) at Guala, Koroba; the ECP at Walete, between Tari and Koroba; and the Uniting Church (UC) at Hoyabia, near Tari. As part of the assessment, tests were administered to a selected number of those who had supposedly completed literacy education in the then current programmes. These tests covered both reading comprehension and writing in three languages, Huli, Tok Pisin, and English. For comparative purposes the very selection of the locations had inherent biases. KBS and UC stations were larger centres where there had been larger numbers of English-speaking expatriates with whom the participants had been able to relate, and were also in relative close proximity to government administrative offices and commercial centres. This was a highly significant factor in the acquisition of languages other than Huli for those communities. At Walete, the missionaries all spoke Huli. At Koroba the missionaries were Pidgin-speakers, and at Hoyabia a large portion of the expatriate community had interacted in English. In addition, at Koroba, there was a thrust in Pidgin literacy through the use of the 'Kisim Save' literacy primers and programme. These biases are

reflected in the compared results of literacy in the different languages. Even further, when investigation was carried out concerning those participants at Walete who had been assessed, it was discovered that many had not been products of the Huli Literacy Programme.

A second inadequacy was that the literacy testing apparatus varied in standard for the three languages. For instance, the English test was far simpler and easier than the Huli test. Later investigation by a separate investigator revealed that it was easily completed by students in Grade Two, whose knowledge of English as a second language was severely restricted. On the other hand, some items in the Huli language reading test were in a genre unknown to the Huli readers. This is significant because, as was pointed out above, literacy is both genre-dependent and discipline-specific.

A third deficiency is revealed in that it did not consider the *function* of vernacular literacy in Huli society. As was pointed out above, literacy in Huli society has little to do with writing, the major function being to read the Huli Scriptures and related literature.

A functional approach to Huli literacy is needed. This functional approach has been exemplified by Heath (Heath 1983, 1986a, 1986b 1984, Heath and Branscombe 1986), and there is an urgent need for an investigation using this approach of Huli literacy. This present paper, however, does not purport to undertake a general research of Huli literacy using that approach. Nevertheless, it does take seriously the functional approach to literacy in investigating those who use their vernacular literacy skills in Huli Scripture use.

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY AND PURPOSEFUL READING

Integrally linked to functional literacy is purposeful reading (and writing). It is general knowledge that human behaviour is purposeful, even if not detectable at the conscious level. This applies to literacy. If individual Huli do not perceive vernacular literacy filling any felt need or functional purpose, then they will not expend the time and energy needed for its acquisition[19] – which apples to most of the population. On the other hand, Christians who desire to read the vernacular Scriptures see both purpose and function. But we must not then jump to the false conclusion that all vernacular literacy is religious. There are other publications available with general knowledge content. These are also eagerly read. But here we are considering primary motivation, purpose, and function.

How Christians read the Huli Scriptures was part of my larger research (Gould 2005), which uncovered not only the percentage of church attenders who possessed the vernacular Scriptures, but also, as a result of personal interviews, just what personal reading of the Scriptures meant to them. Many expressed how

God/the Holy Spirit had spoken to them, opened their understanding to spiritual truth, and had given them peace and joy. That research was carried out in the 1990s, when only the New Testament was available. Now that the complete vernacular Bible is available, it would be profitable to conduct a second round of research and compare results.

Christian women are by far the greater section of the population who use the Bible. This is greatly encouraged and facilitated by the women's fellowship groups, who use study booklets to guide their study of the vernacular Bible. The women who participate in these groups number approximately two and a half thousand in the ECPNG alone. A recent reprinting of a study booklet numbered 3,000. These booklets, of course, will also be used by women in other churches.

A second group who are engaged in literate acts, whether of true literacy or 'reading-like behaviour' (see Holdaway 1979; Holdaway 1988) is the Sunday School. ECPNG has more than 5,000 scholars, and produces activity booklets for these scholars, at least enough for the scholars who are able to use them.

So, even though vernacular literacy has been in the decline phase, there is still a large section of the population engaged in vernacular literate practice. Sales of literacy primer kit sets also attest to Hulis still desiring to learn to read. The cumulative total of successive reprints of these kits exceeds 22,000. That in itself indicates something about the measure of the programme.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

Let us now turn to the negative influences on the motivation to acquire Huli vernacular literacy, and the reason why I titled this paper 'The **(mis)**fortunes of vernacular literacy'. I would like to suggest nine of these historical negative contingencies. I am tempted to say 'ten', but the tenth one is not so much an historical event but the a-historical inherent 'oral bias', which I shall deal with first, before addressing the other nine.

ORAL BIAS

In contrast with our Western literary or literate bias, Huli society, as with Melanesia in general, has an oral bias[20] which is common to small-scale, face-to-face societies. This oral bias still applies even when people learn to read and are classified as literate. In pre-contact time Huli society had no literate practice, and following the introduction of literacy, there is still no perceived purpose for vernacular literate practice. All that needs to be communicated in Huli can be done orally. This inherent bias militates against the motivation for becoming literate in the vernacular – with one exception: within the Christian community the desire to read the translated Scriptures is a powerful motivation.

1. SCHOOLING SOLELY IN ENGLISH

Following the 1955 directive of an 'English only' policy in schools, many Huli children, particularly from the early 60s onwards, entered school without any prior vernacular literacy and completed their schooling entirely in English. This meant that without provision of pre-school literacy students could complete their schooling and still not be literate in their mother tongue. This resulted in two significant negative factors: firstly, students did not want to engage in vernacular literate practice; and secondly, when called upon to write notices, minutes of meetings, and so forth, they were confused in their spelling. This latter completely negated the purpose of the written communication for new vernacular literates.

2. OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE / INTERVENTION

The 60s were bad enough, but during the 70s well-intentioned personnel brought about the use of Non-formal Education funds to subsidise literacy in the Southern Highlands. To receive these subsidies institutions had to provide figures of enrolments and outcomes. It was too tempting for many. Figures submitted were inflated. And within the ECPNG the co-ordinator of literacy in the region paid a special visit to Mendi to collect the funds and then used them for his own election campaign.

The succeeding officer of the Non-formal Education Unit reversed operational policies and believed that the proper approach to literacy was the Freirean approach. It was his stated aim to wrest literacy from the missions. He ran courses to which literacy supervisors were asked to attend. When queried about the difference between the earlier programme in Huli and the new approach one particular supervisor stated that there was no real difference in method, except that literacy workers now could get paid direct from Non-formal Education, rather than through the agency.

Needless to say, this intrusion from outside had a detrimental effect and the Huli vernacular literacy programme went into decline.

3. NO ONE WITH VISION TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROMOTION AND SUPPORT

Following the cessation of the short-term funding subsidies from the Non-formal Education Unit, no money was available to support the vernacular literacy programme. Some, teachers and supervisors who had recently had a taste of money, withdrew from the programme. Inquiries into funding for subsidies proved fruitless. The pre-school vernacular literacy classes were outside the domain of responsibility of the Education Department. And the ECPNG church leaders in the Huli region believed that literacy was not 'their' responsibility: it was a 'school' (education) matter, so they refused to take responsibility for even the adult programme. This decision stands in stark contrast to the validity of two strong themes: the

first being that mentioned above regarding motivation and purpose for reading coupled with the only real domain for functional literacy in the vernacular in the Huli language group being in the church community; and the second is the missiological insight of Donald McGavran, that the proper place for teaching literacy is in the local church (McGavran 1980).

4. PRESTIGE OF OTHER LANGUAGES – ENGLISH & PIDGIN

With the increase of the number of Huli children being enrolled in school with its English-speaking environment, and the rise of a national consciousness and identity, in which Pidgin-speaking became a symbol, the prestige of these two languages relegated the literate use of the vernacular to an inferior position.

5. THE REACTION & ATTITUDE OF THOSE SCHOOLED IN ENGLISH

Those who were being, or had been, schooled in English, while still speaking their vernacular, despised the literate use of it. Many were confused about how to write it, and often wrote it wrongly. The reasons for this are given in detail in my analytical article published in the *PNG Journal of Education* (see Gould 2001)). This problem was further exacerbated when in the last decade and a half many of these students became Elementary teachers (see number seven below). Other students reacted very strongly to the use of diacritics, simply because these are not used in either English or Pidgin.

6. THE MYTH THAT VERNACULAR USE IS NOT HELPFUL FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

During the hey-day of 'English only', many schools administered some sort of discipline for students speaking vernacular in the precincts of the school. The myth was that continued use of the vernacular was detrimental to progress in the acquisition of English. However, what gave the lie to that myth was the standard of literacy skills of students entering Primary School who had completed the one-year Pre-school Vernacular Literacy Programme. Even today, those students are far ahead of those coming out of Elementary School after three years. Some more astute parents have approached Primary School authorities, asking permission for their children to enter grade three without ever having been to Elementary, and the authorities not only allow it, but welcome it.

7. THE INTRODUCTION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLING

In the Huli language group the introduction of Elementary schooling has been an unmitigated disaster, from two points of view. Firstly, teachers who did not know how to write their own language brought real confusion to their students in the vernacular literacy section. In one case a mother, who was a vernacular literacy teacher, reported to me that her daughter had to correct her teacher in writing Huli. In many

Primary schools teachers complained to me about the poor standard of literacy skills of Elementary students entering grade three.

The second prong to the disaster was that many parents were choosing to send their children to Elementary, simply because it was cheaper per year: and enrolments in Pre-school Vernacular Literacy classes dropped. Well trained vernacular literacy teachers, most of whom had little or no formal schooling, were chagrined because unskilled teachers were drawing a salary, while they, with all their skills and experience, were not allowed in.

8. THE INTRODUCTION OF MOBILE PHONES

Mobile phones sold like the proverbial hot cakes. It did not take the Huli long to master the technology – at least that which was required for oral communication. The "each one teach one" motto of the renowned literacy educator of yesteryear, Frank Laubach (Laubach 1964; Laubach & Laubach 1960), certainly proved effective not in literacy but in spreading the use of mobile phones. Mobile phone technology could also have been a boon for literacy if the Huli themselves had also taken to 'texting'. It would have also saved them a lot of money with the mobile telco Digicel daily offering eighteen free SMSs after the initial two each day. But texting never gained widespread use. The 'oral bias' prevailed over the cost. Then, too, there is no predictive text for Huli as there is in English. Of course, exacerbating this has been the long-standing unreliability and untrustworthiness of the postal service, which has done nothing to enhance literate communication.

9. THE INTRODUCTION OF ORAL RECORDINGS FOR WIDESPREAD DISSEMINATION

This is the most recent. There are two main technologies involved here. The first is that of the organization 'Faith Comes by Hearing'. Audio dramatized versions of Huli Scripture have already been digitally recorded and will soon be made available cheaply though the medium of mass-produced playback units. The second is that of the proposed community FM radio station. Already field recordists have begun recording, and programming has commenced in preparation for the time when hardware is in place for the transmission to occur. The ECPNG national president was heard to have cynically remarked, 'Another reason to hinder people reading their Bibles'.

In listing this last detraction, I am in no way decrying the positive benefits which will derive from these technologies. But our focus here is on those negative historical interventions which have detracted from the acquisition and use of vernacular literacy.

Literacy itself has not been abandoned by the educated and semi-educated amongst the Huli. But the word literacy itself should not be used in isolation from the particular language of its use. For instance one may be literate in Tok Pisin but not in Huli. So it is that those Huli who received schooling in English continue to use their acquired literacy skills – but only in English, not Huli. The bundles of newspapers which arrive on the daily Air Niugini flight from Port Moresby are eagerly snapped up, and one observes many individuals standing around the town area absorbing the latest news. Maybe if there had been the financial backing to produce a vernacular newspaper, it would have achieved similar results. Maybe one of the drawbacks has been the lack of published materials – though the number of publications in Huli is considerable, and literates like to get hold of these (by fair or foul means – preferably foul) and eagerly read. Three books of reading comprehension exercises were produced with very durable covers, had print runs of over 1,000 each. These were not for sale, but were to be returned after use in advanced literacy classes. Of these, one title has only a couple of copies left, which I managed to scavenge, and a second but a couple of dozen, the rest presumably having been stolen.

In connection with the supply of published material, 'book floods' have been suggested (Elley 1996; Waters 2000) as an aid for literacy development and retention of literacy skills. However, such a strategy needs huge financial backing.

CONCLUSION

By way of summary and in conclusion, I have outlined the development of a reasonably successful vernacular literacy programme amongst the Huli, a prime motivating factor being the desire for Christians to read the translated Scriptures and associated material. But the programme could have been extremely successful, had it not been for at least nine negative factors.

The way forward at this point of time is to concentrate on the expanding Elementary School programme: to make appropriate modifications to the vernacular language and literacy sections of Elementary and Lower Primary, and to produce teachers who both know how to read and write Huli and are trained in instructional skills. For over eight years I have sought an entry into helping in this way, but have been denied access. A recent joint submission by the district schools inspector at Tari and myself has been delivered to authorities, but is in jeopardy because of the change of government and its minister for education. Should this attempt fail, we can expect not only further decline in vernacular literacy amongst the Huli, but resistance to its use, which is not a very optimistic note on which to conclude.

END NOTES

[1] A considerable amount of the introductory material in this paper is taken from my PhD thesis (2005). The main thrust concerning observations of the factors militating against the acquisition and use of vernacular literacy, however, is new material.

[2] After decades of agitating and lobbying the Huli are in the process of having their own Hela province – the North-Western part of the Southern Highlands - which will include smaller neighbouring language groups.

[3] It is difficult to accurately obtain accurate numbers of Huli speakers, because national census divisions do not coincide with boundaries of the language group. Secondly, many Huli are in diaspora, mainly in urban areas. Thirdly, many people of adjacent language groups are bi-lingual in Huli as well as their own vernacular. Huli missionary pastors to places like Edolo and Walagu have taken the initiative to teach not only oral Huli but use the Huli literacy material because at the time no other materials existed. Figures quoted by the United Bible Society and in *Ethnologue* are entirely outdated.

[4] The historical streams which led to the formation of the UFM and its subsequent mission activity amongst the Gogodala of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea is documented by Weymouth(1978).. See also Garrett (1992:335-337) for a brief summary by an ecumenical historian.

[5] UFM's entry into Huli society and the beginnings of the Evangelical Church is found in Twyman (1966). A more complete historical overview of the development of the work of APCM in Papua New Guinea and the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea are found in Prince and Prince (1981).

[6] This figure is based upon nominal adherence in the sociological sense. The issue of nominal adherence *vis a vis* conversion experience and membership is addressed as part of my thesis (2005).

[7] A case study of the Rules is most instructive, and certainly throws light on the ethos of the Mission, especially in regard to their understanding of the nature of specific 'call' and the way the Holy Spirit works. During a life-time of service in the mission they performed linguistic analyses on more than two dozen languages in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya - all this in addition to their work on the translation of the Foe Scriptures and, as the sole missionary couple, the maintenance of a remote station at Lake Kutubu.

[8] The reception of the Huli New Testament and the underlying motivations promoted by mission strategy is documented in my Masters Dissertation (1986).

[9] Neuendorf (1977) explains the use of Gogodala as a 'church' language in the compendium by Stefan Wurm. The use of 'missionary lingua franche' for both church and schooling in PNG was not uncommon, given the huge number of languages and dialects in PNG. See, for example, Taylor (1977). In Papua Motu was used (Taylor 1977), not only by missionaries, but by traders and government officers, as well as Papuans themselves in their trading. In New Guinea the Lutheran Mission also promoted Kate as the 'church' language (Renck. 1977).

[10] At first Huli parents did not allow their daughters to attend school, and young boys were considered not to have developed proper thinking and reasoning ability, so initially the students were male adolescents or young men. The writer well records his own introduction to the Huli classroom in 1966, when there was only one girl in grade three.

[11] At this stage there were no printed portions of the vernacular Bible.

[12] Information on the pioneer phase was obtained by personal interviews with Val Sinclair (2002) and Joan Erkkila (2005).

[13] In traditional Huli thinking there were two issues: (i) women were dangerous to male virility (compare Lakoff 1987) so the least contact the better; (ii) women were not regarded as equals, in particular not intellectual equals.

[14] Although search has been made, none of these original literacy primers could be located. However, Joan Erkkila assures me that it was so.

[15] This term is used of languages which have a spelling system which ideally meets the two criteria, one symbol for each phoneme and only one phoneme for each symbol.

[16] In terms of Gestalt psychological theory it is recognized that in the early developmental stages children recognize objects as 'gestalts' (wholes) without necessarily identifying the details. When applied to reading, whole words are recognized by their patterned shapes without identifying individual letters. Particularly important in these patterns are the ascenders and descenders of consonant letters. This principle also applies to the way expert readers operate: not only do they not read individual letters, but quite often do not read every word.

[17] There are a few areas in the design of the programme which could possibly attract criticism, not the least of which are: the use of a set of primers and the training in instruction which does not appear to attempt a match with 'traditional' teaching and learning styles, as Stringer purports to do (Stringer 1984, 1987; Stringer & Faraclas 1987). I am not unaware of such criticisms, and have reasoned and practical responses to them; but they are far too lengthy to be included within the scope of this paper.

[18] The *bi yobage*, or metaphor / parable, which the superintendent put forward was that of the market, where sellers are paid by the quality and quantity of the produce, not by the time spent working in the garden to produce it. Amongst some Huli people, however, there was a strong resistance to that particular model, preferring the model of the Community School where teachers received a regular salary from the Education Department, regardless of outcomes. But the literacy programme did not have the financial resources to operate that way, even if it had been a preferred model, which, in the view of the superintendent, it definitely was not.

[19] Embedded in this subconscious approach is the relevance theory of communication as explained by Sperber and Wilson (1987), which in essence says that the receptor of any communication will evaluate how relevant it is to him- or herself and how much mental energy will be required to process it. The higher the former and the lower the latter the more readily the communication is attended to and processed.

[20] I am indebted to Maxey (2010) who advocates a new perspective on the role of orality in Bible translation as contextualization.

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