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Literacy work in Papua New Guinea: the accidental and the planned

Mary Raymond

1. Introduction

In this paper I present a case study of literacy projects in two languages of Papua New Guinea, Arop-Lokep (Arop dialect) and Karnai. The two languages find themselves in very different sociolinguistic and political situations: the Arop people occupy a whole island and are comparatively isolated, while the Karnai people inhabit a single village, are surrounded by speakers of other larger language groups, and have much better access to educational and other government facilities. While carrying out fieldwork on the Arop-Lokep and Karnai languages[1] I assisted with several small scale vernacular literacy initiatives, including writers' workshops, spelling or alphabet design workshops, and the publication of alphabet books, collected stories and 'Shell Books' (cf. Section 3). Most of these initiatives were planned in advance, but a number of them generated unanticipated offshoots and grew in unexpected ways (and with varying degrees of success), often as a result of community members exercising their own resourcefulness. In this paper I will argue for the importance of balancing planning and flexibility in an approach to literacy work. While it is the responsibility of linguists and community language workers to prepare thoroughly, not only for the core activities but also for the preparatory and follow-up stages of the literacy projects they plan to carry out, it is also their task to be responsive and adaptable to the needs and interests of the community, and to respond to the unexpected opportunities that may arise.

[1] My work among the Arop people took place over a 12 month period in 2003 under the auspices of SIL. I worked with the Karnai people for 2 months in mid-2005, carrying out research for my Master's dissertation at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. None of this research, nor the projects described in this article, would have been possible without the support and friendship of my colleagues, Louise Brooks, Bob and Salme Bugenhagen, Donald Chambers, Jeff and Sissie D'Jernes and Vera Schmelz, and the hard work and commitment of my language consultants, Peter Ezekiel and Joe Ande of Arop, and Philip Malai and Chris Lau of Karnai, and above all the hospitality, welcome and willingness to be involved of both the communities concerned. I would also like to thank Jeff and Sissie D'Jernes and Donald Chambers for many discussions on the contents of this paper; their insights have been invaluable.

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It should be noted that I worked on the Arop-Lokep and Karnai languages as a linguist working towards descriptive linguistic goals; I am not a literacy worker and have no training in teaching literacy or running a literacy programme. My colleagues in the Arop-Lokep project, Jeff and Sissie D'Jernes and Louise Brooks, were laying the foundations for a literacy programme which has since flourished and developed considerably, and I was privileged to take part in the early stages of that process. I then made use of some of the same models and ideas in my subsequent work on Karnai. In keeping with the title of this paper, however, my very involvement in literacy work was in a sense 'accidental', taking place in addition to my 'planned' linguistic research, and the events and views presented in this paper must be seen very much as those of a literacy amateur.

1.1 Vernacular education in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea (henceforth PNG) has over 850 indigenous languages, the average population of a language group being around 5,000. In addition the country has two national languages (Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu) and an official language (English). Language is therefore a huge challenge for any education policy to confront. Since Independence there has been an increasingly strong move in PNG towards making provision for *tokples* (vernacular) education at elementary level, and a growing awareness of the need for "indigenous development, not westernization" (Litteral 1999, 2001) in the education system. In 1989 the Secretary of Education approved a National Language and Literacy policy which aimed to encourage the use of the vernacular language at elementary level (the choice of language being determined by the community) with gradual transition to English through the early years of primary school (Litteral 2001).

Admirable though this policy is, the problems of implementation are obviously huge. Some success has been achieved; Litteral (2001) reports that by 1993, vernacular literacy programmes were running in 250 language groups, and that students from those programmes were performing better in Grade 6 exams than those who had not undergone vernacular elementary education. However, there remain many areas where people either do not have access to schools at all, or where lack of appropriate materials, vernacular-speaking teachers or even a standardised orthography mean that primary education (and elementary, if available) is conducted entirely in the national languages and English. The Arop people of Long Island are an example of the first situation and the Karnai people of Umboi Island represent the second.

2. Case study: Arop-Lokep

The Arop dialect of Arop-Lokep has a population of approximately 1800 speakers on Long Island, Madang Province; the Lokep dialect (which will not be discussed here) is spoken on neighbouring Tolokiwa and Umboi Islands in Morobe Province.

There has been no community school on Long Island for the last six years. The original school was at Kaut on the most populous side of the island; it was moved across the island to Matukpunu in the early 1980s for ease of access by school inspectors, a move which resulted in poor school attendance, conflict between school and community, low teacher morale and eventual closure of the school (D'Jernes 1992). In consequence, young people on Long Island are increasingly growing up illiterate, unless their parents have the resources and initiative to send them to school on the mainland. Many older people (ages 40 and over) were sent to Umboi Island to attend schools run by Lutheran missionaries (some returning to establish local schools of their own), and people of this generation are at least minimally literate.

The Arop-Lokep language development programme was established by SIL in 1986 and has been active in developing a trial orthography (see Section 2.1 for a description of part of this process) and producing vernacular literature through writers' workshops (as discussed in Section 2.2), in addition to working towards its primary goal of translating the Christian scriptures. A grammatical sketch is provided by D'Jernes (2002) and an account of the phonology and proposed orthography by Raymond and D'Jernes (2005).

2.1 The Arop spelling workshop

A spelling workshop was held in Matukpunu, Long Island, in November 2003. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss a number of outstanding issues in the existing trial orthography and to test people's intuitions on how to spell some of the problem words and sounds. We hoped that the workshop would raise people's awareness both of the orthography issues themselves, and of the language programme and its goals in general; we also hoped that the discussion would give us some guidance on how to resolve the outstanding issues in the trial orthography. It should be stressed that the workshop was not intended to solve all the problems there and then; it was a very small event attended only by a handful of inhabitants from one village, who were not intended to be a representative group for a language group-wide decision making process. We held the workshop simply in order to talk to people and hear what they had to say.

Both the Arop spelling workshop and the Karnai spelling workshop described in Section 3.1 were based on the Alphabet Design Workshop

(ADW) model developed by SIL (Rempel 1995a, 1995b) but were adapted to local circumstances. The ADW is intended to design an alphabet from scratch, with no prior knowledge of the phonology, and often leading into a full-blown writers' workshop; the model assumes the participation of the whole community or at least of a representative group, but still provides a useful basis for discussion in smaller groups. In both Arop and Karnai, existing phonological descriptions and previous orthography testing enabled us to identify problem areas in advance, and to cut down significantly on the time needed for the spelling workshop. Writers' workshops, as described in Sections 2.2 and 3.2, were held on separate occasions.

The structure of both workshops was as follows:

1. Community members were invited to attend. Attendees were asked to work in small groups and to select a literate scribe from among them; writing materials were provided.

2. A native speaker (one of our language consultants) presented a list of words orally. Some were problem words and some were straightforward; they were presented one at a time and each group discussed and agreed among themselves on how to spell each word.

3. The results from each group were collated on a blackboard.

4. The problematic issues were explicitly identified by a linguist, who then led a discussion on how these problems might be systematically resolved.

Approximately 15 people attended the Arop workshop, both men and women; they all came from Matukpunu village. All had some degree of literacy in Tok Pisin and some had been involved in previous literacy initiatives such as writers' workshops, or had seen trial publications of vernacular Scripture portions. A language development advisory committee, consisting of representatives from each village in the group, had previously met on a number of occasions and had made decisions about much of the orthography. The outstanding issues included:

1. the mid vowels /ɨ/ and /ɛ/, /o/ and /ɔ/. The trial orthography used the digraphs "ie" for /ɨ/ and "oo" for /ɔ/, which occurred less frequently than /o/ and /ɛ/; testing showed that there was considerable confusion about whether "oo" represented /o/ or /ɔ/, and about whether /ɨ/ was written "ie" or "ei".

2. the high vowels /i/ and /u/ and their corresponding allophones [j] and [w]. In the trial orthography, high vowels were written as "y" and "w" word-initially, verb root initially and intervocalically. In all other environments they were written as "i" and "u". Again, there was considerable variation in their usage in native speaker writings.

Table 1: *Arop trial orthography*

phonemic	gloss	trial orthography
tol	'three'	"tol"
tɔl	'person'	"tool"
tɨk	'sea'	"tiek"
tɛ-k	'faeces-1SG.POS'	"tek"
ielei	'why'	"yelei"
uɑsɑ	'bird species'	"wasa"
poioi	'wild duck'	"poioi"
i-rriui	'3SG-wash'	"irriui"
i-iimi	'3SG-buy'	"iyimi"
ku-uuk	'2SG-cough'	"kuwuk"

We found that the spelling workshop process was useful to attendees and to the language programme on several grounds. In particular, the discussion brought the orthography issues to participants' attention in a structured way, increasing their awareness of and ability to articulate the problems; it also raised the profile of the language programme and general interest in writing the language. What the workshop did not achieve – and indeed, we had not expected it to – was any resolution of the orthography issues mentioned above. Attendees were reluctant to propose solutions, to choose between the solutions we suggested, or even to express their opinions very strongly. They felt that any decisions had the potential to affect the whole language group and the future of the Bible translation and, quite rightly, did not consider themselves representative of the group and able to make such decisions.

Image 1: *Arop women discussing spelling issues*

Lock and Lock (1993) report on a similar situation where their four Abau[2] language consultants were uncomfortable working with a trial orthography because they felt unable to take responsibility for decisions that would affect the whole group. The Locks held a 'spelling conference' to which they invited all the influential and educated people in the district, including school teachers, business people, a university graduate and a provincial member. They used similar methods to those described for Arop above to stimulate debate on orthography issues and to guide this more authoritative group to a consensus on the Abau orthography. The public nature of the event and the prestige of the people involved gave the community a sense of ownership of the orthography, rather than seeing it as something brought in by white outsiders.

A conference of this sort has the potential to be a way forward for Arop, but represents certain problems. The Arop group constitutes a large and geographically scattered community; internal relationships between villages are characterised by physical remoteness and lack of political unity, and the situation is complicated by often difficult inter-denominational relationships between churches. Low levels of education throughout the group mean that, unlike Abau, Arop lacks people who are respected as authorities in the area of

[2] Abau is a Papuan language spoken in Sandaun Province, PNG.

literacy. Identifying and bringing together a group of people who are able and willing to represent and make decisions for the whole group is therefore hugely challenging; as mentioned above, there is an existing language development advisory committee which has been able to make the more straightforward decisions, but for logistical reasons it is able to meet only rarely; it should also be noted that the membership of this committee is fairly fluid. Convening a larger group would be even more problematic, both politically and logistically. One might also ask whether a large group is more capable than a small but representative committee of reaching an acceptable consensus.[3]

The Locks themselves found that their spelling conference was unable to reach a consensus on certain issues by discussion alone. The phoneme /ɾ/ and its four allophonic variants [ɾ ɻ t d] was particularly problematic; people had strong views on how the allophones should be written but were inconsistent in practice. The Locks asked participants (individually) to spell a list of words according to their preferences; they then compared the results and used simple statistics to show people that there was no consistency in the spelling of the /ɾ/ allophones, and on that basis the conference was able to come to the agreement that the allophones should all be represented by the grapheme "r".

The Locks' approach is a good example of linguists empowering the community to make its own informed decisions. The Arop orthography discussions differed from the Abau example in that the main issue involved differentiating pairs of phonemes, rather than under-differentiating sets of allophones. The discussions in which I was involved centred on people's uncertainty about possible solutions, in contrast to the Abau people's strong and divergent views about what should be done. It is therefore not clear to me how the Locks' method could be used in this situation; their approach, however, suggests that the role of the linguist in such a situation should be to seek means by which to guide or direct the community debate to an acceptable conclusion.

Although it is desirable and in most cases possible for a language community to make its own decisions about orthography, guided and advised as appropriate by linguistic experts, I suggest that there may also be political situations in which it is better for the linguists to take both the responsibility

3 I suggest that both the Abau story and the Karnai spelling workshop described in Section 3.1 are examples of such an approach being successful in PNG communities, where politics tends to be very much consensus-based rather than dependent on a few individuals with elected or inherited power (at least in the communities of which I have experience).

and any subsequent criticism for those decisions – guided and advised by community views, and ideally in a public forum. Responsibility for orthography decisions should certainly not be imposed on any one individual or group of individuals without the agreement both of those involved and of the wider community to recognise that group as authoritative; and it may always be possible that the linguists, as outsiders, and having no particular allegiance to any one denomination or village (except perhaps by residence or association with certain individuals), may be in a better position to represent a neutral authority than any internal body, especially on technical issues that people find difficult and confusing, and may desire leadership on anyway.

In Arop, orthography issues have now been largely resolved through other means. Rather than asking people to make orthography decisions, the very practical approach was adopted of giving people the opportunity to try things for themselves, by holding writers' workshops and asking participants to test a particular orthography solution as they write. For instance, in the Bara workshop discussed in Section 2.2, people were specifically asked to under-differentiate the four mid-vowels in their stories, i.e. to use only the graphemes "e" and "o", and to think about whether this created any problems. It has since been decided, through this process of discussion and application, that under-differentiating the mid-vowels obliterates too many important distinctions, and the Arop orthography now uses "ie" and "oo" for the phonemes /ɨ/ and /ɔ/, even though the contrast sometimes creates confusion for new learners. It can be learnt and causes no problems for those who have had appropriate training. With regard to the high vowels, the spelling workshop revealed a slight preference by most speakers to write the high vowels as "i" and "u" intervocalically. Raymond and D'Jernes (2005) therefore proposed writing the high vowels as "y" and "w" only word initially (e.g. /uɑsɑ/ – "wasa" – 'bird species') and verb root initially (e.g. /i-iimi/ – "iyimi" – '3SG-buy'), and all other high vowels as "i" and "u" (e.g. /kɑuɑl/ – "kaual" – 'mountain'; /poioi/ – "poioi" – 'wild duck'). Further discussions ensued, however, and it has now been decided that "y" and "w" be used in words where the high vowel is always intervocalic, i.e. in nouns, which are unaffected by morphophonemic changes (e.g. /kɑuɑl/ – "kawal"; /poioi/ – "poyoi"). In verb roots, where morphological processes affect the status of the high vowel, "i" and "u" are used (e.g. /i-rɑuɑ/ – "iraua" – '3SG-hit.SG.OBJ'; /i-rɑu/ – "irau" – '3SG-hit'; /rɑu-uŋu/ – "raungu" – 'hit-NOM').

Encouraging people to try out one particular 'solution' rather than discussing the problem in the abstract proved very successful in the Arop situation. By holding a series of workshops in different villages over a period of time, a forum was established in which people could approach the issues in an applied way, and establishing and standardising an orthography became a gradual, organic process in which different sections of the community could be involved (and claim ownership of) at different times.

2.2 Arop writers' workshop

A major problem for pre-literate societies is the lack of reading material available to literacy students to practise on. A writers' workshop is a seminar or series of seminars designed to encourage people to produce texts in their own language, with the further goal of publishing those texts as a book (or books) for distribution to the community (Wendell 1982).

A writers' workshop was held in Bara village, Long Island, in October 2003, over a period of a week, and was attended by about 30 literate adults from the village (plus a crowd of onlookers, of whom more will be said below). Classes were held each morning and students spent time in the afternoons and evenings working on a series of assignments. Our language consultants, who had also been involved in previous workshops, did most of the teaching, with supervision and assistance from others on the team. Topics covered included the importance of the Arop language and the usefulness of literacy; revision of the alphabet and an overview of the working orthography; and a discussion of what makes a good story. Time was also given to discussing any problems students encountered while doing the assignments (in particular relating to spelling and punctuation) and to reading and reviewing the assignments themselves to help students improve and develop their stories. The assignments were as follows:

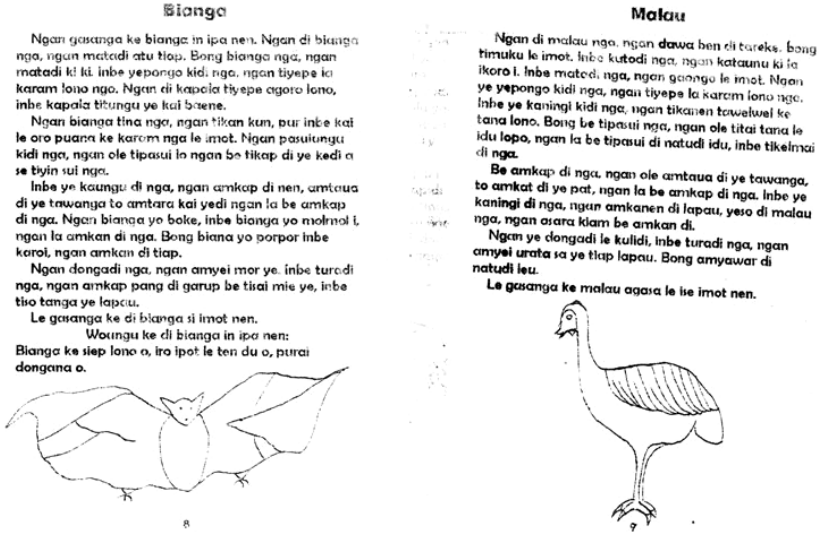
1. *Animal stories*. This was a group assignment to encourage people to start writing. After the first day's class, students chose an animal native to the island and wrote (in groups of four or five) a short paragraph describing the animal, its eating habits, its habitat and how it bore its young. An artist from each group drew an accompanying picture of the animal, and the results were later published in a small silk-screened book, *Di asara ke Pono* ('The animals of Long Island') and distributed to participants.

2. *'First time' stories*. For their first individual assignment, students wrote an account of the first time they had done or experienced something; they chose topics such as 'The first time I made a canoe' and 'The first time I flew in a plane'.

3. No topic was set for Assignment 3 and not all students completed it, some preferring to spend the time polishing their 'first time' stories. Several students, however, were keen to write down a traditional story, and others had stories of their own that they wanted to tell; this assignment was an opportunity for the stronger students to exercise their abilities. The teachers, and others with a high level of literacy, also acted as scribes to help some of the illiterate older people to write down their stories. The stories produced for Assignments 2 and 3 were silk-screen printed and bound in a 40-page volume which was distributed to participants.

The Bara workshop served several purposes. As already mentioned in Section 2.1, it provided a forum in which the trial orthography could be presented, discussed and tested; participants were not asked to make orthography decisions but there were opportunities for people to discuss spelling issues and to express their opinions about possible solutions. The workshop was also an opportunity to talk about story writing, encouraging people to think about story telling techniques and to transfer both their literacy skills and their skills as oral story tellers to written Arop. The two books were a final concrete outcome of the Bara workshop; through them, the workshop not only generated a new interest in Arop literacy but also made new literature available to Arop readers.

Image 2: *Pages from the animal stories book produced at the Bara workshop*



Bianga

Ngan gasanga ke bianga in ipa nen. Ngan di bianga nga, ngan matadi atu tiap. Bong bianga nga, ngan matadi ki ki. Inbe yeponga kidi nga, ngan tiyepe ki karam lono ngo. Ngan di kapala tiyepe agoro lono, inbe kapala titungu ye kai baene.

Ngan bianga tina ngo, ngan tikan kun, pur inbe kai le oro puana ke karom nga le imot. Ngan pasuiungu kidi nga, ngan ole tipasui lo ngan be tikap di ye kedi a se tiyin sui nga.

Inbe ye kaungu di nga, ngan amkap di nen, amtaua di ye tawanga to amtara kai yedi ngan la be amkap di nga. Ngan bianga ye boke, inbe bianga yo molmol i, ngan la amkan di nga. Bong biana yo porpor inbe karoi, ngan amkan di tiap.

Ngan dongadi nga, ngan amyei mor ye. Inbe turadi nga, ngan amkap pang di garup be tisai mie ye, inbe tiso tanga ye lapau.

Le gasanga ke di bianga si imot nen.

Woungu ke di bianga in ipa nen:
Bianga ke siep lono o, iro ipot le ten du o, purai dongana o.

8

Malau

Ngan di malau nga, ngan dawa ben di tareks. Bong timuku le imot. Inbe kutodi nga, ngan kataunu ki la ikoro i. Inbe matedi, nga, ngan gaanga le imot. Ngan ye yeponga kidi nga, ngan tiyepe la karam lono nga. Inbe ye kaningi kidi nga, ngan tikanen tawelwel ke tana lono. Bong be tipasui nga, ngan ole titai tana le idu lopo, ngan la be tipasui di natudi idu, inbe tikelmai di nga.

Be amkap di nga, ngan ole amtaua di ye tawanga, to amkat di ye pat, ngan la be amkap di nga. Inbe ye kaningi di nga, ngan amkanen di lapau, yeso di malau nga, ngan asara kiam be amkan di.

Ngan ye dongadi le kulidi, inbe turadi nga, ngan amyei urata sa ye tiap lapau. Bong amyawar di natudi ieu.

Le gasanga ke malau agasa le ise imot nen.

9

2.2.1 The accidental: children's alphabet classes

An unexpected sideshow at the Bara writers' workshop was an alphabet class for the children of the village. On the first morning they crowded around the church where the workshop was taking place, and watched the alphabet revision lesson with noisy interest. At break time, one of the mothers approached me (my role being mainly that of handing out pencils and paper to

the workshop students): the children had no school, but they wanted to learn to write too. The workshop had no pencils or paper to spare, having attracted more students than expected; but a couple of lap-sized blackboards and a bag of chalk were found, and with those I set up school in an empty sun shelter. My class that week varied in number between 15 and 30 students, and in age between 3 and 15. Some of the older students had done a year or two of primary school; some of the younger had been taught a little by enterprising parents. Few of them spoke Tok Pisin so I taught them using sign language and my limited Arop (which by the end of the week had improved remarkably!). I taught them for a couple of hours a day for four days, constantly observed by crowds of people who were waiting for their cases to be heard in the village magistrate's court, which happened to take place at the same time. After a day or two the older children, who were aggressively possessive of my limited supplies, and dictatorial to the younger ones, were asked by the mothers to leave, and I restricted myself to teaching the younger children to write and recognise their names and a couple of basic words; time, resources and relevant experience were too limited to allow me to do anything more.

Image 3: *How to spell 'banana' in Arop: teaching Bara children*

I have no doubt that the teacher learnt more than the students from those few classes, both in terms of communicative ability in the Arop language, and in how not to teach the alphabet; a course in basic literacy teaching and some prior warning of the event would have aided me greatly. The children, apart

from those who had already had some instruction, retained very little of what I tried to teach them even from day to day, much less into the future with no ongoing teaching to back it up. The benefit both to Bara village and to the rest of the language group was the enthusiasm for literacy generated both by my class and by the writers' course itself. In particular, one of the parents, Paul Kiaka, followed with great interest my attempts to teach his children to write vowels, and developed a huge enthusiasm for vernacular literacy as a result. Paul began by writing the alphabet on the side of his house where everyone could see it. He went on, a couple of years later, to take part in SIL's STEP (Supervisors' Tokples Education Programme (SIL-PNG 1993)), which aims not only to train native speakers to set up and run a vernacular education programme, but also to run teacher training courses to train other teachers within the community.

3. Karnai

Karnai (also known in previous literature as Barim) is spoken in Padamot village on Umboi Island, a large island which is also home to speakers of Lokep, Kobai, Mangap-Mbula and Mutu; there are also Karnai speakers on tiny Aronaimutu Island, off the Umboi coast, which they share with speakers of Mutu. The Karnai population is estimated at approximately 500 (Raymond 2005).

In comparison with Arop, educational facilities available to the Karnai people are good. There is a primary school in Padamot, with two teachers and two grades available at any one time, allowing for a new intake of students every three years. The teacher for the lower grades is a Karnai speaker; teaching, however, is almost exclusively in Tok Pisin and English. High school education to Grade 10 is available in the nearby town of Lablab, meaning that most adults are educated to secondary level. Karnai is the smallest language group on the island, and the only one not to have any published Scripture or a vernacular literacy programme; as a devoutly Christian community with a strong sense of their own cultural and linguistic identity amid larger groups the Karnai people feel that this is an injustice and are very keen to rectify the situation. There has been much talk in the community about establishing a vernacular elementary school; elders had approached an SIL linguist, Bob Bugenhagen, for assistance, and he had developed a trial orthography and published a number of small literacy readers in that orthography using the 'Shell Book' methodology.[4]

[4] Shell Books are an easy way of producing large quantities of vernacular literacy materials rapidly. They are based on a 'shell', or an electronically formatted version of a book in which the illustrations and page layouts are already prepared, and only the appropriate language text needs to be inserted. While translation is a non-ideal means

My linguistic fieldwork on the Karnai language was carried out on the understanding that I would make some contribution to these community aspirations, in particular with regard to improving the orthography (which faced similar issues to those I had worked on in Arop, a closely related language), and also by producing further literature and literacy materials for community use.

3.1 Karnai spelling workshop

The Karnai spelling workshop was held in Padamot village in June 2005, and was attended by most of the inhabitants of the village, including all the community elders. I had anticipated the workshop being a gathering of a dozen or so interested people, whose opinions I would ask in order to write some sort of statement on orthography issues, as had been done in Arop. I had, however, underestimated the community's interest, the prominence of the workshop's location under a large mango tree in the centre of the village, and my own crowd-pull factor as a recently arrived and very rare white visitor to the community; and most of the village turned out for the event.

The main issues were similar to those of Arop:

1. the mid vowels /e/ and /ɛ/, /o/ and /ɔ/. The trial orthography used a circumflex to identify the higher mid vowels /e/ as "ê" and /o/ as "ô".

2. the semivowels /i/ and /j/, /u/ and /w/. No rules were articulated in the trial orthography.

3. the consonants /b/ and /w/, both of which have the allophone [ß] in intervocalic environments, which people tended to write as "v".

I expected results similar to those generated by the discussion in the Arop workshop: awareness of the issues, increased interest in my work and in writing the language generally, but little progress on finalising or even agreeing to test any new orthographic decisions. In contrast to Arop, however, the Karnai group is small, enjoys political and religious unity (the people have resisted the incursions of any missions other than the Lutheran church, whose leadership is closely identified with the traditional village authority structures), and is largely located in one village. Literacy and education levels are generally good. The four Karnai clans are accustomed to holding

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of producing good vernacular literature, the Shell Book methodology can be useful for producing materials such as elementary literacy readers, other school books, health information booklets and other general information; for instance, in Arop we produced an information booklet about HIV/AIDS, which was distributed to community leaders in order for them to raise awareness of a growing problem in the region. For further information, see Trainum and Snyder (1989).

university-style debating society meetings on topics as diverse as birth control and drug policing; while I was there they were preparing for a debate on political independence from Australia, Clans 1 and 2 representing the 1975 Government view and Clans 3 and 4 the Opposition (sadly I had to leave the day before the debate was to take place).

The Karnai people, when presented with a problem, were prepared to argue about it until everyone present had come to a consensus on a solution; the fact that a representative group was present at the workshop had a major impact on the dynamics of the discussion. People wanted to hear the options I had to propose (should we, for instance, use the Arop digraph "oo" for one of the two mid-back vowels, the grapheme "ô" proposed by Bugenhagen, or should we under-differentiate?) but had their own views and put them forcefully. The ensuing debate lasted a couple of hours, much of the time occupied by two vociferously opposed camps on the problem of "b", "v" and "w". Only when everyone had come to an agreement on all the decisions was the discussion considered closed and the workshop over. The orthography was used in the texts which I published later in my fieldwork (see Section 3.2), but continued to have 'trial' status while people thought about the decisions, tried them out, and saw how they looked in the texts. The decisions were as follows:

1. no differentiation of /e/ and /ɛ/, /o/ and /ɔ/, as very few minimal pairs could be found and most could be distinguished from context.

2. semivowels to be written as "y" and "w" intervocalically; this seemed to be a general preference in people's spelling (the nominalization problem mentioned at the end of Section 2.1 for Arop is not an issue in Karnai).

3. [ß] to be written as "b" or "w" according to people's preference for individual words, and the issue possibly to be revisited at a later date.

Table 2: *Karnai revised trial orthography*

phonemic	gloss	orthographic
i-ro	'3sg-fly'	"iro" (previously "irô")
i-rɔ	'3sg-hit'	"iro"
i-re	'3sg-build'	"ire" (previously "irê")
i-rɛ	'3sg-leave'	"ire"
pojoj	'wild duck'	"poyoi"
tawud	'moon'	"tawud"

I have no information on whether the Karnai trial orthography is still in use, but people were keen to write their language and my hope is that the spelling workshop helped and encouraged them to do so, whether or not in a standardised way, and that it provided them with concepts that would enable them to continue the discussion even without the presence of a linguist and a follow-up literacy programme.

3.2 Karnai writers' workshop

A writers' workshop on a much smaller scale than the Arop writers' workshop was held in Lablab, the main settlement on Umboi Island, in May 2005. It was aimed at Karnai students studying in Lablab at the Siassi Lutheran High School (grades 7 to 10), and the purpose of the workshop was narrower than that of the Arop workshop: I hoped to increase students' interest in the language (as the smallest language in a multilingual school, Karnai is not cool!), and to encourage them to write stories and transfer their literacy skills to Karnai. The workshop also constituted a source of data for my linguistic analysis of the language (a good reason for all linguists to conduct writers' workshops – written texts may not be naturally occurring conversation, but they contain valuable data and have the advantage of being pre-transcribed). As in Arop, the resulting texts were published and distributed to the students, with additional copies being sent to the community not only as a first contribution to Karnai literature, but also as examples of the trial orthography in use.

The format was less formal than in the Arop workshop: because the students were only available for two days (a Saturday afternoon and the bank holiday Monday that followed) there was no time to do much explicit teaching, nor did students want an extra two days of school. The trial orthography was presented to them but there was no discussion of the issues as in the Arop workshop; students have no authority in the Karnai community, are not considered by their elders to speak the language well, and asking them to participate in such a discussion would not have been appropriate.

The students wrote their stories with guidance, assistance and feedback available from three native speakers throughout the process. The first two assignments were much the same as in the Arop workshop. Students began by writing group descriptions of local animals in the first half of the Saturday afternoon session; they started on their 'first time' stories the same day, and took them back to their dormitories to complete them. Those who wished to do so came again on Monday to write a third story, bringing with them the 'first time' stories of the others. For the third story, students were told that they could write about whatever they wanted, but that if they couldn't think of anything to write about, they should write on the topic of 'A time I was very

afraid'. All the students did in fact write on this set topic; setting a specific final assignment was more appropriate to this group, who were dislocated from the Karnai community, less fluent in the language than their elders, and less familiar with traditional stories and the traditional narrative style.

The main products of the Karnai writers' workshop were superficially similar to those of the Arop workshop: a pamphlet-sized (A5) book of animal stories, *Di usar ki tan be tek* ('Animals of land and sea'), and a larger (A4, 13 pages) book containing students' individual stories (which were, perhaps not surprisingly, much shorter than the Arop stories).

Image 4: *Front cover of the Karnai story book Nin ki mata kankanang be tadang ('First time and fear stories')*

In both the Arop and Karnai workshops, the stories were edited by language consultants to correct participants' grammar and spelling. This was particularly important in Karnai for two reasons: firstly, because one of the purposes of publishing the books was to show people what the proposed trial orthography would look like; and secondly, to make sure that the books did not contain errors that would reflect badly on the students and on the books themselves. The importance of the editing process became even clearer when the students' stories were printed. In Arop, the stories had been typed into a computer, a draft version printed and corrected, then wax stencils were cut using a dot matrix printer. In Karnai, the stories had to be typed onto the stencils using a manual typewriter, which meant that after typing there was no possibility of making further corrections. Some of the students were criticised for the high number of spelling errors in their stories, which were in fact not their errors at all, but the product of a non-Karnai speaking typist trying to read much-edited handwritten drafts.[5] I worked hard to spread the word that any errors were the mistake of the publishers, not of the students, but this problem may have undermined the acceptability of the books. The story serves to emphasise that, despite the desirability of 'natural' uncorrected language in doing linguistic analysis, when it comes to publishing texts for community use, the editing process is crucial to both the success of the books and the standing of the authors.

Returning to the issue of the lower level of fluency of the Karnai students, one might ask whether their stories should have been published at all. For distribution to the students themselves, I would argue that it most certainly was; nothing can be more encouraging to new writers than to see their work in print, and the whole event would have been pointless if the students had been unable to see the results of their labours. As for sending the books to the community, it can only be said that their publication was met with great excitement by native speakers, even if that excitement was tempered with certain reservations about the accuracy of the spelling.

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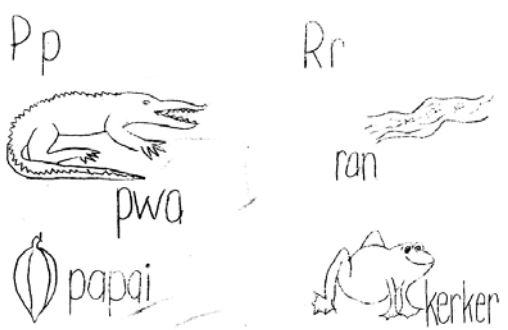
5 I have been asked why I did not train native speakers in the book production process. The answer is that for Karnai I was there for too short a time and needed my consultants to work on other things; for Arop, the printing was done on a Gestetner printer which involves much less manpower, but Arop speakers are now learning to use silk screen printers as part of the STEP course. It should be noted, however, that teaching people to use simple technologies such as a silk screen is not sufficient to make literature production ongoing after the linguist leaves. As Waters (1990:32) observes, "Both [computer and silk screen] technologies require backup from outside the agricultural communities of PNG." Even a silk screen requires supplies of stencils, paper and ink.

The Karnai students' fluency in the language was also a problem for my inclusion of their stories in my text corpus for linguistic analysis. My Shoebox database contains the corrections and comments made on the stories by my language consultants, and no conclusions were drawn from these stories that could not be verified from other sources in the database. I maintain that, within its limitations, writers' workshop material is a useful source of linguistic data, particularly when time for consultant-aided transcription of audio recordings is limited.

3.2.1 The accidental: the Karnai alphabet book

An unexpected but valuable **bi**-product of the Karnai writers' workshop was an alphabet book. It came about because my language consultants and I decided that it would be useful to include a page in the larger of the two storybooks, describing and explaining the trial orthography. I asked them to think of example words starting with each letter, and words with each letter occurring either medially or finally; when I rejected verbs as examples (all verbs start with a prefix), one of my consultants, Philip Malai, realised that what I was looking for was concrete nouns, or "things you can draw". The other, Chris Lau, who was an avid doodler when doing linguistics got boring, took this as a request to start drawing, and did so. The results were etched onto wax stencils with a dead biro, together with the accompanying letters, and they were printed and compiled as the Karnai Alphabet Book. While the quality of the printing is poor and some issues in the Karnai orthography are still subject to question (we restricted ourselves to non-controversial examples), the book serves as a statement and a reminder about what was debated and decided at the spelling workshop; the pictures are lively and attractive and people are pleased with the book because it demonstrates that Karnai can and should be a written language, just like the other languages on the island.

Image 5: *Pages from the Karnai Alphabet Book*



4. Outcomes

The Arop and Karnai literacy initiatives I have described here have led to different destinations for the Arop and Karnai people. The activities which took place in Arop, in particular the Bara writers' workshop, generated considerable community enthusiasm. This enthusiasm was channelled into an ongoing programme by the recruitment of three Arop men to participate in SIL's STEP course; as mentioned in Section 2.2.1, these men have gone on to run further writers' workshops, producing a substantial body of literature in Arop, including a series of over 40 'Big Books' (A3-sized predictable stories for class reading); they have worked with the language committee towards setting up a school board for the anticipated vernacular elementary schools, and recently taught the first of three units of a teacher training course for 25 new teachers (D'Jernes p.c.).

Active community participation and ownership of the programme has continued to maintain people's interest and enthusiasm for literacy in Arop. The STEP course participants have also learnt the importance of both planning and flexibility in their own work; in the first writers' workshop they led, in Kaut village, they prepared for 20 participants (in accordance with STEP guidelines) and had insufficient resources for the 52 people who showed up. The newly trained teachers limited each participant to a single page story (rather than two or three stories as in previous workshops) so that everyone could contribute. They nominated a team of three artists and about ten of the best writers to produce the stencils for a single book of very short stories, which was printed on location in the village. Their flexibility paid off; there is now strong support in Kaut village for the long term goal of establishing vernacular elementary schools (D'Jernes p.c.).

The Long Island government school has also re-opened this term in Matukpunu village. The teachers are struggling to cope with high student numbers (there are 70 students in the Grade One class); it is to be hoped that the elementary schools will help to relieve some of this pressure, although they are also likely to be oversubscribed. Some of the issues that led to the closure of the original government school still remain (in particular the problems of the school's location and of poor transport connections to the mainland for the teachers). It will be particularly important for the school to cultivate good relationships with the community and to work together with the elementary school programme to outweigh these issues. The future for Long Island education, however, seems promising.

Unfortunately I have no information on the progress of Karnai vernacular literacy since I left the Karnai community. The Karnai people already had a strong interest in vernacular literacy before I began work on the language. The literacy initiatives in which I was involved increased their enthusiasm; the spelling workshop, which was the main event held in Padamot village itself,

was met with great approbation and an outspoken desire for a Karnai language programme to continue. It also led to an explicit request for me to come back and continue to work with them (with Bible translation and a vernacular elementary programme as the twin primary goals), an invitation I have not taken up. Whether the Karnai people had sufficient momentum, resources and training to carry on without a targeted follow-up programme from an outside source (such as assistance from other SIL teams on the island) seems slightly unlikely but not impossible, given this group's capacity for taking me by surprise. At least one man had been sent by the community to train as an elementary teacher; he had then lost interest in the project and the community had chosen someone else who was as yet untrained. The education levels and political unity of the Karnai people are sufficient that if training is sought for the right person for the right task, and with consistent community support for the project, they might achieve a great deal on their own; it remains to be seen whether this will be (or has already become) the case.

5. Conclusion

In these case studies I have described a number of small scale literacy initiatives carried out in two very different PNG communities. I suggested in the introduction that these events illustrate the importance of combining planning, flexibility and a responsiveness to community needs in an approach to literacy. For planned literacy activities such as writers' workshops and spelling workshops, prior planning not only of the core activities but also of the preparatory and follow-up stages (where follow-up is possible) is crucial. Where the unexpected happens and things gain their own momentum, planning needs to take place 'online'. In the case of both the Bara children's alphabet classes and the Karnai alphabet book, the first question we had to ask was "Do we have enough paper?" The answer was "no" in the first case (but an alternative solution was found) and "yes" in the second (otherwise the book might never have been published). With unplanned activities, too, thought needs to be given to follow-up. As noted in the case of the Bara alphabet classes, their success was very limited if their goal was to teach the children to read and write; what they did achieve, together with the writers' workshop, was a fresh enthusiasm for literacy in the Arop community, and it was the follow-up programme, in the form of the STEP course, that was able to transform that enthusiasm into a (hopefully) more lasting result.

An expatriate linguist's commitment to working on a particular language, and to literacy work in that language, usually has an endpoint, whether in the long or short term. As in the Karnai case, a follow-up programme to a literacy event is not always possible. I do not believe that this negates the value of running short term literacy initiatives, where these can be self-contained and produce a concrete end result in and of themselves. Teaching basic literacy

skills to children probably does not fall into this category, but working with already literate adults on transfer of literacy skills to the indigenous language is a more achievable short term project, particularly with the concrete goal of producing texts both for documentary purposes and for community use. The ultimate goal of any literacy programme instituted by an expatriate linguist, however, is that the programme will eventually gain sufficient momentum in the hands of the community that it can continue long term without outside assistance; whether this is achievable depends very much on the community itself, and on how successfully the community and the linguist have been able to work together to prepare for this outcome.

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