



The

# Storyboard

Spring  
2002

published by the  
Papua New Guinea branch of Pioneer Bible Translators

## Has Literacy Changed? by Joanne Locnikar

Literacy is a hot issue in Papua New Guinea. Although literacy work has been around for as long as translation, high government involvement and support make this an opportune time to promote literacy in our language programs. With the initiation of the new partner-

ship involving the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Pioneer Bible Translators (PBT), Bible Translation Association of PNG (BTA), and Bible Society of PNG (BS/PNG), however, new questions have to be asked: Have literacy needs and methods changed in PNG

over the years? If so, how? What about the attitudes and perceptions of national men and women?

I posed these questions to some of the most qualified people I know — translators and literacy workers, both national and expatriate, who have worked in language programs at the grassroots level for the past 30-35 years. They each have fascinating stories to tell with many changes unique to their language groups. But this article will concentrate on the common changes they have experienced in literacy over the years and how programs and policy have been adapted to better address those changes. I would first like to introduce the people I interviewed for this article.

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Rambai Keruwa is a literacy coordinator for BTA. He helped with translation and literacy for the Kaugel (Umbu-Ungu) language in the Western Highlands. He is also a member of the National Literacy Awareness Council representing five highlands provinces. His interest in literacy began in the 1970s as a community schoolteacher.

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### Editor's Notes

*This issue of The Storyboard focuses on literacy. The author of our lead story, Joanne Locnikar, is a literacy specialist for the Summer Institute of Linguistics. As the editor of SIL's READ magazine, Joanne has her thumb on the pulse of this arm of SIL's considerable educational work in PNG. She also trains participants in the Supervisors' Tokples Education Program (STEP). In that capacity, she sees firsthand the vitality of the Tok Ples Preparatory Schools (TPPS) program run exclusively by national teacher supervisors.*

*This issue also spotlights two of PBT's own national literacy supervisors/trainers. Thomas Dukun, subject of our feature biography, has been chosen by SIL to serve as principal of the Sepik STEP Course, to be held in Amanab in the Sandaun (West Sepik) Province. This intake of STEP will run in five four-week modules over the next year and a half, and will accommodate thirteen participants from seven language groups who, because of location, would find it difficult to attend the STEP intakes held in Ukarumpa in the Eastern Highlands Province.*

*As you read the inspiring testimonies from Thomas Dukun and Francis Bainang, please remember that PBT exists to translate Scripture, but we also actively promote literacy, plant and build churches, and do whatever we can to obey Christ's Great Commission.*



Rambai Keruwa

## Has Literacy Changed? .... continued from page 1

Joy Atkinson is a literacy worker with the Siane-Lambau of the Eastern Highlands Province. She first came to PNG in the '70s as a teacher at an Australian-run school in Daru. She joined SIL in 1977. The Siane-Lambau New Testament was dedicated in April 1998.



Joy Atkinson and Joanne Locnikar

Jim and Jaki Parlier<sup>1</sup> (SIL) first allocated in 1962 with the Managalasi in Oro Province. They dedicated their New Testament translation in 1976. They returned in 1995 to work on a revision, which was dedicated in 2000. The Managalasi people continued with literacy classes while the Parliers were gone.

Al and Susan Boush (SIL) allocated in 1972 with the Tifal in Sandaun (West Sepik) Province. They dedicated their New Testament translation in December 1998. To promote literacy in their language area, they spent one entire term (four years) focusing on literacy only and setting aside the translation so the people would be able to read the Scriptures when they were finished.



Jim and Jaki Parlier

In the 1960s and early '70s, many PNG nationals were preliterate and had not even seen books or papers. The literacy focus for SIL then (this was pre-PBT) was to introduce literacy materials and show the people how to use them. Teams had been instructed to always start with the village leaders so others would become interested. Both the Parliers and Boushes stated that this approach failed. They were more successful starting with women. Basically, only one reading method was taught at that time, but both teams adapted their materials for more successful programs.

Today, most nationals have been exposed to literacy to some extent. With more widespread contact outside the immediate language areas, people are aware of books, newspa-

pers, and signs in English and *Tok Pisin* (Melanesian Pidgin). Many young adults are able to read in both these languages. Beginning literacy programs in the vernacular now include transfer and fluency levels and a variety of reading methods to teach people to read and write. "Transfer" allows a reader to transfer

his reading skills from one language to another. Fluency classes provide the opportunity for improvement.

In the '70s, each province had an adult literacy officer whose job was to coordinate literacy programs in villages and to hold training sessions.

[The *Kisim Save (Get Knowledge)* materials came out of this movement.] Unfortunately, the officer didn't always get to the more isolated areas within the provinces. When this program died out in the early '80s, adult literacy became the responsibility of the local churches, communities, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). This branch of literacy continues under the auspices of these groups today.

Socio-economic changes in the country have influenced the attitudes people hold today concerning literacy. It has become a valuable part of life for many. Increased exposure and interaction with outsiders and towns have resulted

in changes in the functional literacy needs of many. Now people see the need to read newspapers, prices and labels on store goods, advertisements and signs. With many looking for jobs in the towns, there is also the need to be able to fill out reports and applications. Places that have been isolated for years are now confronted with businesses coming in, such as lumber and mining companies. The people feel the need to be able to read the documents and contracts presented to them for signatures. These

needs require literacy in either English or *Tok Pisin*, rarely in the vernacular. But the seed has been planted, and more people value literacy as a part of their daily lives.

Community schools were not widespread in the '60s. Most were run by churches and missions.



Al and Susan Boush

<sup>1</sup> Jaki Parlier is the author of *Poking Holes in the Darkness* (1994, Promise Publishing) which tells of the Parliers' work with the Managalasi of Oro Province, Papua New Guinea.

Teaching was always in English or *Tok Pisin*. In the mid-70s, the community schools came under the government's formal education system. Today, most young adults have been to community school; some finished Grade 3, and others, Grade 6. The majority of children do not go on after Grade 6.

A major change in the school system nationwide occurred in 1990. This change has been a great encouragement to vernacular literacy proponents. A new Elementary Reform Policy was drafted and adopted by the National Department of Education. This new policy states that community schools will phase in a new program in which the first three years of schooling will be primarily taught in the vernacular. Students will then transfer to instruction and literacy in English. This new policy has increased opportunities for translators to promote the use of vernacular Scriptures and has resulted in high community interest in

to work with the government on provincial and national levels. Also in the '80s, SIL assigned literacy workers to work with more than one language team with a region or province. They worked as trainers or consultants for the language teams trying to start their own community literacy programs. The focus continues to shift to training national men and women in specific language programs to become teachers and trainers themselves. In some cases, language teams within a province worked together and held their own training sessions with national co-workers, teaching them to run their own literacy programs.

Today, SIL runs an ongoing training course for supervisors of TPPS programs in villages all over the country. The STEP course is a response to the need for widespread training of national men and women to run and expand their own community-based literacy programs. It focuses on prep schools for children, but also addresses the need



*The STEP Training Center at Ukarumpa,  
Eastern Highlands Province*

vernacular literacy for both children and adults. The communities that have not yet started the Elementary Prep program (it may take 7-8 years) are now anxious to start their own Tok Ples Prep Schools (TPPS). Many missions and NGOs are involved in this aspect of literacy right now, since TPPS is considered non-formal education.

For many, the focus on vernacular literacy by the government has been a wake-up call as they see their languages in danger of dying out. Those who can read and write in the vernacular understand first-hand how the Scriptures speak to their hearts like no other language can.

In response to these many changes in literacy over the years, SIL has also changed policies and programs to better fit the needs of the people. In the '60s and '70s, literacy workers were always assigned to one language group to get a literacy program running. It was pretty much a process of outsiders coming in, setting up a program, and then trying to turn it over to the community to claim as its own.

As literacy needs increased and literacy became more widespread, SIL seconded literacy workers

for adult literacy programs in the vernacular to provide an ongoing supply of national teachers for the prep schools. In addition, the Partnership encourages national-run literacy programs in villages where there is no expatriate translator.

Within SIL, the major changes in response to the changing literacy needs in PNG have been:

- Broadening our training from individual language programs to many language programs simultaneously, by province and even nationwide.
- Using a variety of reading methods so the trainees can choose which method is best for their program.
- Implementing the philosophy that the people themselves need to own the literacy program from the beginning if it is to be successful.

Despite the many changes in literacy in PNG over the last 30-35 years, our ultimate goal remains the same: to provide the Scriptures in the vernacular so people may read the Word of God in their "heart languages" and truly understand it.

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Joanne Locnikar is a literacy specialist with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. She is currently working in STEP (Supervisors' Tokples Education Program) in Ukarumpa and serves as editor of SIL's *READ* magazine.



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*Bringing the Word to Life*

## Akighiman!

In the Spring 2001 issue of *The Storyboard* (see "A New 'Read' on Literacy Projects," page 3), we reported a pilot literacy project under the supervision of the Partnership of SIL, PBT, BTA, and BS/PNG, with specific advisory help from Thomas Dukun and Ellen Rohrer. We also asked for your prayers for this project. Thomas and Ellen would like



to update you on the progress they have made—with God's help—in one year's time. The Akighim [Ah-kug'-hum] now have in their hands forty-five copies each of an *Alphabet Book*, a *Spelling Guide*, and two books of original stories and artwork. *Storyboard 3* has been typeset and is ready for checking, and

*Storyboard 4* is in the process of being typeset. Thomas has scheduled a *Literacy Materials Production Workshop* with the group in March, a checking session in May, and a *Teacher Training In-Service* in September. We ask you to continue to petition God's blessings on our project.

## Help Wanted

If you have skills in both PageMaker and Publisher desktop publishing programs, then PBT needs your help! We have available 246 small, simple literacy books, compiled by SIL on a CD, which can very easily be translated by our teams into the vernacular and then used in their literacy programs.

Our problem is that all 246 books are laid out in the PageMaker program, but PBT would like to use Publisher instead. Therefore, we need someone to transfer each book from one program to the other. If

you think this is a possible short-term ministry opportunity for you, please contact us!

### Bikmaus Rokrok

The Big Mouth Frog



**Thomas Dukun**

Way back in 1982, when PBT translator David Parrish and his family lived in Tambap-mining, I was chosen by my community to become a member of the Mbore Translation Board of Management. In our meetings, we always talked about how we could help Steven Piki and Danny Ram, our two national translators, to carry on the translation. After each meeting, David Karbae (Karbae is the clan name we gave David Parrish) gave us lap boards and chalk and asked us to write names of things in the Mbore language.

One day I asked David this question: "Who will read this Bible when it is ready?" The answer that David gave me was, "You yourself will be the answer to your question."



**Francis Bainang**

were held outside in the shade of a mango tree. After five days, my uncle told me to use an open *haus boi* (men's gathering house) instead. I taught from 8:00 a.m. until noon. Each day, after sending the students home, I would get my bush knife and an axe and go into the bush to look for posts to build a classroom. It took me a week to gather the materials for building the classroom.

Community leaders and members began to realize that I was serious about this work, so they started to organize work teams to help me. They told me to do the teaching and they would do the building.

After four months as a literacy teacher, I was then selected by the

In 1983, after attending literacy foundation workshops in Ukarumpa, I started the Mbore literacy program, with which I continue to work to this day. In 1994, Francis Bainang and I enrolled in the Supervisors' Tokples Education Program (STEP). At that time I was not a practicing Christian. I had been born into a Catholic family, but I had no real faith in Jesus. Through the daily devotions and twice-weekly Bible studies at STEP, I developed faith in Christ. I came to understand that it is not one's denomination that counts; it is only Jesus. Now I share the Word of God in the Catholic Church in my village of Garik-Damur.

My involvement with the literacy program over the years has not only strengthened my own spiritual life, but that of my family, also. I thank God for His wisdom and the blessings given to us. My wife, Maria, and I have five children: Belinda, Precilla, Lynus, Elijah, and little Justine.

After graduating as a literacy teacher on 22 April 1994, I started my first literacy classes with a total of twenty-six students.

These classes were held outside in the shade of a mango tree. After five days, my uncle told me to use an open *haus boi* (men's gathering house) instead. I taught from 8:00 a.m. until noon. Each day, after sending the students home, I would get my bush knife and an axe and go into the bush to look for posts to build a classroom. It took me a week to gather the materials for building the classroom. Community leaders and members began to realize that I was serious about this work, so they started to organize work teams to help me. They told me to do the teaching and they would do the building. After four months as a literacy teacher, I was then selected by the literacy board to attend SIL's STEP course in Ukarumpa. In 1995, I got involved on a voluntary basis with Pioneer Bible Translators as a literacy supervisor for the Mbore program. My mission is to promote both literacy and translation among the Mbore language group. At that time, I started to grow in my love for God and His Word, and I began to search for some Bible studies that would help me learn more about the Bible and the Christian life. I took a correspondence course from a Bible College in the United States. I now use those materials to teach Bible study classes in my community.

At this time, I supervise thirty teachers in five community schools, each averaging six classes. We have a total enrollment of 121 students. I intend to start adult literacy classes in the coming years.

I am married and have five children, all of whom are girls. Two are old enough to attend school, but the three youngest stay home with their mother.

Please continue to support our program with your prayers. Thank you.