

- Are there any expressions that will be difficult to translate?
- Does the Handbook give you the help you need, or is the Handbook weak on this point?
- Are there any expressions you thought were easy to translate until you found out what they really intend to say?
- Do you think you have learned enough about the ancient text so that you can say it in your language?
- As you write, are you shaping the expressions as people would actually talk or write creatively in your language?
- Do the various translation suggestions help, or must you create something different?
- What questions do you still have? What new questions? Can you find the answers?

After translating the section, please return to the section heading and see if you still agree with what you wrote.

- Would it have been better to prepare a section heading after you translated the section?

Final comments

The above set of suggestions will seem rather simplistic to some, while for others it will be on too high a level. The material is set up merely to provide some ideas for development and application according to local needs.

One final request: It will be very helpful if at least some translators can develop the habit of taking notes on their impressions of any given Handbook. For those who attend training workshops it may help them to provide responses if they are given one or more sheets with the following written across the top:

“Please note page number, with chapter and verse, for any comments.

What information do you need that is not in the Handbook?

What information do you disagree with?

Are any words, sentences, or paragraphs unclear?”

If you can help us in this manner, we may be able to help you better. We'll keep on trying!

FOCUS ON TRANSLATORS

This article has been written by Raewyn J. Pattemore and Stephen W. Pattemore who have worked with the Urak Lawoi' people in South Thailand since 1984.

– Editor

A place for Scripture and reading in a pre-literate society

What role does literature play in society? Does it in fact have a role? Many of us may feel that the answers to these questions are obvious and the questions themselves are unnecessary. But there are societies at both ends of the "literacy spectrum" for which these questions are very important – we mean societies where there is little or no reading at present, and other societies where people no longer feel the need for reading. For these societies the questions above will determine our whole view of Scripture and the needs of translation. In contrast to the American Bible Society's recent work in producing Scripture using multi-media format, many translators are still committed to producing printed Scriptures for societies which have no traditions of literature in their own language other than oral literature and no access to high technology.

We have probably all heard stories of groups of people where conversion to Christianity has been immediately followed by an intense desire to learn to read, so as to be able to read the Scriptures (usually the only printed literature in the language). If only this always happened! In reality the task of encouraging widespread literacy among minority groups, and the use of Scriptures in their own languages, is often slow and the results uneven.

Things might be easier if each society was in isolation. But in today's world a society without literature in its own language is probably receiving influence from other societies which are literate. Two ways in which this happens are through education programmes in the national language and through television. In fact, in many places where tribal groups have access to television in the national language, they are gaining information and being entertained without feeling the need to learn to read at all. In this article we would like to focus on one such less-than-ideal situation in the hope that the lessons we have learned will be of value to others.

Background: the Urak Lawoi'

The Urak Lawoi' (or "Sea People") of South Thailand number about 4000 people, scattered over a large number of islands on the Andaman Sea coast. Over the past 25 years their language has been studied, an orthography (system of writing) has been developed using the Thai script, and literacy materials have been prepared and used. A number of individual books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament have been published and the translation of the whole New Testament is now in its final stage. However there are probably only about a dozen people altogether who read Urak Lawoi' at all, and only half of those can read fluently. In several areas it seems as if the younger generations are losing their language.

In early 1992 this situation raised many questions and challenges for us. In particular we wanted the New Testament, when finished, to be read and to find a significant place in the society. Our project team consisted of only ourselves (husband and wife) and our time among the Urak Lawoi' was limited by our children's educational needs. So we had

to ask ourselves how we could best use our time, not only to complete the translation task, but also to make sure that the Urak Lawoi' Scriptures would have a place in the life and thinking of the people.

After a number of years living away from the area we were able to spend a year back in an Urak Lawoi' village. While we were there one of our main aims was to evaluate the literacy situation with a view to producing reading materials. It was at this time that an article came to our attention which was to prove very helpful for studying the trends in Urak Lawoi' language use and literacy. It was Roland Walker's "Obstacles to Ongoing Vernacular Literacy" (in *Notes on Scripture in Use and Language Programs*, Number 30, December 1991, pages 18-31).

The paragraphs that follow are our application of Walker's study to two communities of the Urak Lawoi' and the strategies for literacy in their language which have developed as a result.

Obstacles to literacy in the local language

Difficult orthography

Written Urak Lawoi' uses Thai letters, which means that those who have learned Thai at school do not have to learn a new script. It is actually much easier to learn to read Urak Lawoi' than Thai because it is not a tonal language, it has no traditionally accepted "literary" style, and it uses fewer characters. However people who have already learned to read Thai have struggles with a few letters which have different sounds from the Thai, and with the lack of tonal markers. There are also some words with sound patterns which are not able to be represented in Thai and are spelled like the Malay words they are derived from. This confuses many Urak Lawoi' who do not know Malay and do not understand its relationship to their own language.

Lack of cohesion among Urak Lawoi' communities

Urak Lawoi' villages are widely scattered on different islands and all have Thai villages nearby. Their contact with each other is fairly limited, which thus limits their sense of belonging together and acting as a group. This is also reflected in the differences in religious practice from village to village, even among the three villages on Phuket Island. The villages are also under cultural and language pressure from the majority Thai population and each village has its own individual response to this threat to its identity.

Weak sense of identity

The sea tribes of South Thailand are not as distinctive in dress or in culture as the hill tribes of the north, and therefore they have been quite unknown in Thailand generally. Despite the presence of three Urak Lawoi' tribal villages on Phuket Island, the majority of the Thai population there do not understand that they have a distinct and valid language, culture, and belief system of their own. This may be changing

slightly with more exposure in the local press and television, including a recent documentary on a national TV network.

Constant contact with the national language

The Thai language has to be used for shopping, health, education, and any government business, as well as on a daily level with Thai neighbours. In a lot of situations the tribal people can use the Southern Thai dialect they are more comfortable with, but at other times they are disadvantaged if they are unable to speak standard Central Thai.

Language shift

This means the gradually increased use of one language at the expense of another – in this case Urak Lawoi' being replaced by Thai. We see this taking place to varying degrees in the villages we are familiar with. In some cases the final outcome is quite uncertain, in others it seems more stabilised. We will report on a study of two different situations below.

Previous use of the national language in literacy

About 12 years ago, when there was quite an interest in learning to read Urak Lawoi' in one village, a government literacy programme in Thai was arranged for the villagers. This was very time-intensive, mentally and physically exhausting, and quite culturally inappropriate. Unfortunately it discouraged most of those who had been keen to read. In any situation where literacy is needed, as in contacts with government officials, it is Thai literacy which is needed.

No existing framework for the use of literature in the local language

There is a fellowship of local Christians in each of the two villages under discussion, which gives some framework within which to use literature in the tribal language. However this promising situation is complicated by the availability of the complete Thai scriptures – which look more “official” because they are bound in black with red edging! The leaders who can read Thai have also preferred to read them because they are complete.

Lack of Government approval and support

The government has until recently displayed a lack of interest and concern for the welfare of these people. (This is not true of the free medical care sponsored by the Princess Mother two days a year.) The Thai government would like all tribal people to become Thai, and does not see the importance of keeping their unique language and traditions.

Lack of community involvement in a literacy programme

Most of the material available until now has been produced by the missionaries. Recently, however, a few tribal people have become involved in producing reading materials.

Village literacy profiles

While the hindrances to tribal literacy apply in general to all Urak

Lawoi' communities, the two villages which we studied were quite different in their patterns of language use.

Yuban village: This village seems to be in a pattern of "stable bilingualism". Urak Lawoi' is the language of the home and related tasks, and of traditional beliefs, and it does not seem threatened in these areas. Children's first language is Urak Lawoi'; and although the majority go to the local Thai school, their preferred language of play after school remains Urak Lawoi'. Meanwhile Thai is used for going to school and market, for health care and official business. The physical situation of this village no doubt contributes to the stable pattern of language use. It is physically more isolated from neighbouring Thai communities, with only two or three Thai families resident within the village. People from Yuban seem secure and confident in their cultural identity and use their own language in town, despite the stares of Thai people. It is possible that Yuban people are not threatened by Thai because they are in a position of being able to choose when they can use it (for instance, they choose when they go to town) rather than having to use it out of necessity with Thai neighbours.

Rawai village: In contrast, this village has been in a pattern of language shift to Thai which has seemed almost impossible to reverse until recently. The present generation of young people, who are now starting to marry and have their own babies, have grown up being spoken to mostly in Southern Thai and using it as their first language. At the same time they have heard their elders using Urak Lawoi' among themselves, so they still have some limited understanding and use of their own language. People from Rawai are more embarrassed about their cultural origins and shy to speak their own language in Thai settings, such as in hospital.

This lack of confidence in their identity and their language is probably because of their particular situation. They live on a main road at a famous tourist beach and are surrounded by Thai settlements. They are exploited and pressured by both the Thai landowners and the foreign tourists. Recently, however, there have been some encouraging trends in language use which may be a result of the threat these people are feeling to their whole identity and traditional way of life. A young village leader has completed an extensive dictionary (Thai-Urak Lawoi') with words arranged in lists of topics (for example, birds, fish, parts of the body). He wants to help the children remember their language. Young people are increasingly choosing to use the tribal language in work and social situations. Intermarriage with people from other villages where the language is still strong is also influencing people at Rawai.

Advantages of literacy in Urak Lawoi'

Despite some negative factors, we can see many advantages in continuing to work for a greater level of literacy in Urak Lawoi':

- 1) Urak Lawoi' is easier to read than Thai, so that those who have

only limited reading abilities in Thai still have the possibility of learning to read their own language fluently and with understanding.

2) The Thai Scriptures are written in literary Thai and use a lot of special royal words, so they are hard to understand for people with little education and limited comprehension in Thai.

3) When literature is available in their own language it encourages more people to read and use the language, and to take a pride in their cultural identity.

4) It can be a way for the oral traditions to be passed on from the elders to the younger generations.

5) It can help some people who learn to read their language to become more confident in reading Thai.

6) The use of Urak Lawoi' in the church and in the Christian context has no doubt already been helpful in encouraging the use of the language at Rawai.

7) The production of Urak Lawoi' literature could meet particular needs which the people feel but which are not being met by any of the literature available in Thai. There has been little incentive to keep up reading skills in Thai as there has been little Thai literature that is relevant to their lives.

Conclusions

In this study we have tried to determine whether there is a future for literacy in this group's own language. Are there enough people still speaking it? Are they interested in retaining their language? Are the children growing up speaking the language? And further, if the responses are positive, which areas of need could be met most appropriately with literature in their own language? Who should we be targeting in our production of literature? And in what ways can we get the community involved in their own literacy programme? There are three points to consider:

- 1) The language situation at Yuban continues to be stable.
- 2) At Rawai there is a degree of renewed interest and use of Urak Lawoi', possibly in reaction to the colonising influence of Thai, on which we could focus and build.
- 3) In both villages we have been encouraged by a very positive response to the idea of producing books, especially for children. It is very likely that adults are increasingly realising the importance of education and the ability to read in today's world. The adults also seem to realise now that it is a good thing for their children to retain their own language.

We can see very positive reasons for continuing with a programme of providing other literature in the tribal language in addition to the Bible translation programme. Indeed, by providing more general reading material in their own language we will enable more people to be able to read the Scriptures fluently and with understanding. It works both

ways. Producing the Scriptures in the tribal language encourages people to learn to read. At the same time the Scriptures need to find their own place within a wider pattern of tribal literary. To try and overcome some of the obstacles to Urak Lawoi' literacy and maximize the advantages, we are attempting a three-point strategy:

- 1) To invite community involvement in fundamental decision making: We have had discussions with a much wider group of people, including many who had not read any of the existing material in their language. We explained the problems of the orthography and this resulted in their acceptance of the basic outline of the orthography, apart from one major change we made on their advice.
- 2) To provide a sample range of literature in appropriate areas: We decided we must build on the existing literacy in Thai, so we have now been working on literature in the following areas:
 - (a) Simple illustrated early readers, aimed at introducing young school-age children to reading their own language while they are beginning to learn to read Thai. These also serve at least two other purposes. They reinforce Urak Lawoi' language concepts for children who are not confident in the language, and they can also be used to teach adults to read.
 - (b) A step-by-step transition primer, which aims to take a person who is well literate in Thai (an adult or older child) through the various distinctive features of Urak Lawoi' orthography and on to confident reading of their language.
 - (c) Booklets in areas of community welfare such as health, diving safety, marine conservation.
 - (d) Booklets containing indigenous stories that have been recorded. These are both present-day and traditional – stories of the sea, of tribal origins, and so on.
 - (e) Bible story booklets. While we have had the UBS Easy Reader series in print for some time, we aim to supplement this with individual story booklets based on the SIL SHELL books developed in Papua New Guinea. Books of coloured pictures of Bible stories produced by Language Recordings International ("*Look, Listen & Live*" series) are being taken apart and Urak Lawoi' text pages inserted. These have proved very popular.
 - (f) Booklets on topics of Christian teaching such as marriage and family life.
- 3) To stimulate the community themselves to become producers of Urak Lawoi' literature: So far only two Urak Lawoi' have ever written a significant amount in their own language. Both have been language informants and translation helpers. We need to help others appreciate the advantages of choosing to write in their own language, and to stimulate them to record in writing their own experiences at sea and stories they remember from childhood. It would be

good to have a regular news-sheet covering areas of concern to the village, but that is still in the future. We are looking for ways to involve women in the literacy programme as we know several good readers. It is well known in literacy work that women's ability both to speak and to read their own language is a key factor in passing on the language to the following generations. Thus we are preparing booklets covering areas of particular interest to women as well as seeking to encourage some to record their own stories.

The Urak Lawoi' New Testament is now complete in draft form and is on track for publication within two years. By that time we hope that this strategy will mean that it will find more readers waiting for it, and will take an honoured place in a wider framework of Urak Lawoi' literature.

R.G. BRATCHER

CURRENT TRENDS IN BIBLE TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH

Rev Dr Robert G. Bratcher, now retired, is involved in the preparation of a study Bible for use in Brazil

These comments have been extracted from a longer presentation which was given to UBS personnel and some others earlier this year.

– Editor

In the January 1995 issue of *The Bible Translator* there is an article written by Philip Stine entitled "Trends in Translation". That article focuses on translation theory, and in particular it reviews two recent books which the author regards as very significant. My focus here will be on translation practice (or malpractice), and on some of the trends that I have noticed, in English.

Reader sensitivity

This expression is meant to identify the increasing tendency on the part of translators (and publishers) to be aware of how potential readers will react to certain words and phrases. With such an awareness it is possible to take appropriate steps to avoid negative or hostile reaction to a new translation or revision.

Many people are now aware of the changes made in the second edition of the TEV New Testament, in which "the blood" was introduced into those passages where the Greek word *haima* had been translated "death" or "sacrifice". I had not noticed at the time that other changes were also made, again in response to "reader sensitivity". Daniel 8.14 had been rendered: "I heard the other angel answer, 'It will continue for 1150 days, during which evening and morning* sacrifices will not be offered. Then the Temple will be restored' ". The footnote was: "1150 days ... morning or 2300 days during which." The text was changed to: