Extensive Writing: A way to foster metalinguistic awareness and literacy development

Cindy Schneider, University of New England (Australia)
cindy.schneider@une.edu.au
Languages of Pentecost Island

(Reproduced from Gray 2012: 38)
Indigenous language literacy: The challenges

• How to help children read / write in L1?
• How to deal with variation in a mixed dialect classroom, where code-switching is prevalent?
• How to stem dialect loss?
Vanuatu Education Sector Program
Expectations of Teachers (15/10/2012)

• “- be able to help children develop in their mother
tongue and later transition to English or French”

• “- understand the basic principles of child language
acquisition and how they can help children learn
language”
Vanuatu Education Sector Program
Expectations of Teachers (15/10/2012)

• “- have command of a particular vernacular language in spoken and written forms and be able to adopt standardised speech patterns and consistent spelling of that language”

• “- be able to make and use teaching and learning materials”

• “- be able to make up / adapt songs, rhymes, etc for literacy (and numeracy) in the language”
The SK Orthography Workshop
Results

Theme: Nakamal mo ngayon.
Narong Winis, ba sabap nu tei kin at mate naihagol.
Leilen Winis, kina an tema bawo ten narong.
Kina Dong ba tawawun se mate naihagol.

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Winis bi Subu

- Naaka Winis bwa ratvep tei kina ad naai gol.
- Lelen it le Winis, lelen neea kina ad naai gol, ba kinarong te vaaro naai gol se.
- Lelen Veninada nia Winis ram si itnan ba Subu te ratbwulung niai ramgit il ni Winis orong
- Antorai kina bwasal idaa.
- Asia, entori kinarong bwasal ili veninan bi mwaubumi bwaan bwaana bwaalee bi ramling tamat nan.

Marie Noel. Matan.
P. Chanel. Tabi
Ingnas. Bule
## Examples of Variability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Text 1</th>
<th>Text 2</th>
<th>Text 3</th>
<th>Text 4</th>
<th>Text 5</th>
<th>Text 6</th>
<th>Text 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘before, first’</td>
<td>vawoo</td>
<td>bawo</td>
<td>bawoh bawoh bawo</td>
<td>vaavo</td>
<td>bawo</td>
<td>bawoo</td>
<td>vawo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘meeting house’</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>wunis</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>winis</td>
<td>wunnis</td>
<td>wunis</td>
<td>wunis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘very, long ago’</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>naihgol</td>
<td>naihgol</td>
<td>naaigol</td>
<td>na i h gol naih gol</td>
<td>nahi ngol</td>
<td>naihgol naihgol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘thing’</td>
<td>kina</td>
<td>kina</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>kina</td>
<td>kina</td>
<td>kina</td>
<td>gina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications of these results

• Is it necessary / desirable / realistic to impose standardised spellings in language communities with no tradition of literacy?

• L1 literacy is an important skill – later applied to acquire literacy in major languages
L1 Literacy Development

“On the elementary school level, ... children acquire the skills of literacy when they read and write extensively, talk about language and about what they read and write, have abundant time for independent reading and writing, receive constructive feedback on their writing, ask their own Qs, formulate and test their own hypotheses, are not afraid of making mistakes, are encouraged to become serious authors, and are immersed in literate activities across the curriculum. [...] students ... who become fluent writers before having to focus on correctness ... become more successful academic readers, writers, and learners.”

(Rorschach & MacGowan-Gilhooly 1993, p57)
ESL Research

→ Implications for Vernacular Literacy

1. **Extensive reading/writing** research in ESL studies (Rorschach & MacGowan-Gilhooly 1993: 4; Herder & King 2012: 128)
   → Writing without fixating on ‘correctness’

2. **Field recordings/transcription** (Heath & Mangiola 1991)
   → Student as researcher: transcribe, analyse
Bridging the Divide between Fieldwork and Pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIELDWK</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS record / transcribe natural spoken text</td>
<td>STUDENTS record / transcribe scripted sources: interviews, context-focused situations</td>
<td>STUDENTS translate ‘shell’ books</td>
<td>TEACHERS translate ‘shell’ books for children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cline of Linguistic Autonomy
Benefits

• Develops fluency and self-confidence
• Authentic texts relevant and meaningful to students’ lives
• Builds learner autonomy: The more students invest in the program, the more they get out of it
• Teachers freed from unrealistic burden of ‘correcting’ students’ spelling
• Doesn’t require teacher to speak same dialect as student
• Reading/editing natural texts increases awareness of variation, dialect differences, code-switching practices
• Builds language corpus
• Enriches linguist’s understanding of native speaker intuitions
• Non-teacher linguists can engage with teachers in meaningful way
Challenges

• Far removed from conventional teaching methods: difficult to get teachers and policy makers on board

• Language ‘purists’ in the community may be ideologically opposed
Four Take-home Messages

1. Not always realistic / desirable at the outset to impose *standardised spellings* on language communities

2. Research in L1 + ESL pedagogy can be reinterpreted to indigenous language contexts
Four Take-home Messages

3. Existing research finds:
   (a) extensive R/W highly beneficial;
   (b) students-as-researchers gain metalinguistic awareness

4. Pedagogy / Fieldwork operates on a continuum – learners progress from one end to the other as they gain fluency and competence
Thank you!
Komudak!
Mahalo!
cindy.schneider@une.edu.au