

**CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN VERNACULAR LITERACY PROGRAMS**

**OF IRIAN JAYA, INDONESIA**

**LARRY M. LAKE**

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**Supervisor of Dissertation**

  
**Graduate Group Chairperson**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My own interest in Irian Jaya dates from 1957 when my family moved there. My parents were teachers and translators with one of the mission organizations, and lived in the Balim Valley at Pugima. Although I attended a boarding school in Sentani, on the north coast, I spent my vacations with my parents in the interior. We returned to the United States in 1965. In 1972, while majoring in anthropology at Wheaton College (IL), I began the plans for research that led to my later projects in Irian Jaya. The first of these was a six week trip in 1979 for Mission Aviation Fellowship, in which my wife Mary Beth and I were writers and photographers for a multi-media presentation documenting MAF's 25 years of service in Irian Jaya. Our travel in 1979 to all of the major areas of mission work in Irian Jaya was an important survey of future research possibilities there. In 1980 I began corresponding with H. Myron Bromley, a linguist (Ph.D., Yale 1972) who has worked in Irian Jaya since 1954, in which we discussed research questions and the possibility of my conducting a field project there. Years of correspondence followed, including a visit by Dr. Bromley to the University of Pennsylvania in 1982. In April 1986, I was invited to come to Irian Jaya as a "guest helper" for UNCEN-SIL, a collaborative effort in which Summer Institute of

Linguistics, attached officially to the government Department of Education and Culture through Universitas Cenderawasih (UNCEN) carries out research and community development efforts in linguistics, anthropology, translation, and literacy. This arrangement permitted my presence in a province which has in recent years been reticent to allow outsiders to do research or to travel extensively. My earlier connections with mission organizations not affiliated with SIL or with UNCEN also proved fortuitous. I accepted invitations to 15 literacy sites; only 5 were SIL allocations. Mission executives gave me access to information and personnel affiliated with other sites where visitation was not possible. In only two cases were trips prohibited by government limitations on travel into politically sensitive areas.

My fieldwork in Irian Jaya began 18 January 1987 and ended 28 June 1987. I made forty flights within Irian Jaya, to visit 15 literacy programs. I interviewed personnel associated with another 28 literacy programs. I collected over 60 pieces of printed materials from the various programs, made over 500 photographs, and recorded 32 hours of audio tape.

Several hundred people and dozens of organizations were helpful to me during the correspondence and fieldwork which resulted in this dissertation. Personnel in Irian

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Myron and Marj Bromley have openly encouraged my research plans in Irian Jaya since a conversation we had in Sentani in July 1979. While we were in Tangma during

this trip, they were like our own family, despite the imminent completion of their own writing project, the translation of the New Testament. If I ever make what Myron calls a "salient contribution" to the cause of Christian missions in Irian Jaya, it will be largely through their wise counsel and open enthusiasm for my studies there.

I thank my parents Hi and Mary Lake for first taking me to New Guinea in 1957, and for their tireless encouragement of my education and of my sometimes bizarre-sounding projects over the years.

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written about. In some ways, of course, my many months of writing since our return from Irian Jaya have been an even larger trial of patience and understanding from family members. All of us are relieved that this part of the journey is done now, too.

## ABSTRACT

CULTURAL ADAPTATION  
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Larry M. Lake

Ph.D., Writing  
Graduate School of Education  
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The semi-nomadic cultures of Irian Jaya's lowland regions, where small bands live for several weeks in one home location and then move to a hunting camp for a few weeks before returning, present educators with difficult challenges. This study of educators' adaptations to local culture in vernacular literacy education programs is facilitated by field data from six months of observations in Irian Jaya, and uses classroom and village observation among the Iau, Sikaritai, Asmat, Momena, Berik, and Kwerba language groups, to investigate the nature of teachers' attempts at adapting to local uses of time, location, power, sex roles, and existing education systems, limited resources, and indigenous leadership enabling vernacular literacy education.

Besides extending the literature on education in such societies, this study should also suggest some solutions to educational problems in such contexts. Knowing the strategies followed by educators under such conditions may enable the discernment of patterns among successful programs, and may suggest fruitful areas where further

adaptation will be advisable for some programs.

Special attention is given to the ways that students' and teachers' behavior seems to be prompted by considerations of cultural adaptation. On the surface, the key activities to be seen in these descriptions often have to do with teaching technique: board use, encouragement of invention (free writing), handling of breaks in schedule, distribution and use of textbooks, and classroom arrangement and furnishings.

Yet, the handling of these mundane mechanical details reflects a far deeper adaptation to local concern for relationships and camaraderie, as seen in the ways teachers talk, their concern for observing in-class progress, their methods of fostering assignment completion, their interest in students' participation in class activities, and their encouragement of expression of local experience. Further, some important cultural adaptive issues emerge with examination of pervasive themes in Irian Jaya vernacular literacy programs: the necessary adjustments to the special geographical problems of Irian Jaya education systems, the surprising blurring of sacred/secular distinctions in programs essentially begun as supports to a religious outreach, and the development of local support and leadership for the continuation of programs which may not currently have

long-range support by missionaries.

Since most Irian Jaya vernacular literacy programs are sponsored by Protestant missionary groups, study of educational problems in these locations also necessitates consideration of the nature, motivation and stated goals of such groups, a historical perspective on their work among these cultures (and those in the highlands), and a comparison of their language and education programs with those of the Indonesian government's programs. Examination of some of the interrelationships between mission, vernacular, and Indonesian programs reveals a complex environment for educational adaptation and cultural change.

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