

Literacy & Linguistics for Strengthening and Growing the Local Church

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Consultants=global nomads

Literacy

Preprimers

“Preprimer materials are literacy materials designed to teach reading readiness skills to people who have had little or no exposure to reading and writing.” It teaches basic skills such as reading from left to right, writing your name, finding identical shapes, etc.

Bibles International has developed preprimers in languages we considered “preliterate.” In addition to doing preprimers as a foundation for our own primers we have done preprimers for languages that have already had a primer developed but was being underutilized because people did not have basic reading readiness. The need for preprimers is decreasing as languages increasingly come in contact with print even though their own language may not be in print.

Reading Primers

“A primer is a book, or series of books, that contains instructional material for teaching reading and writing to **beginners** or **semiliterate learners**.” Basic primer materials are designed for people who have reading readiness skills in place. They focus on word attack skills, certain basic comprehension skills, and basic reading skills and writing skills.

The reading primer has historically been the primary tool of Bibles International’s literacy department as well as literacy departments of all agencies similar to our own. Our primers have been based on the Gudschinsky method developed by Sarah Gudschinsky, the former director of SIL’s literacy department. It is a phonics-based approach designed specifically for preliterate people. “A typical lesson in the Gudschinsky instructional program teaches independence, comprehension and fluency through listening to a story, introducing new letters from a keyword, drilling the new letter in syllables, building new words using the new and previously known syllable combinations, reading a story, writing the new letter and words and creative writing.”

The parts of a typical Gudschinsky lesson include:

- Story read to the learners
- Language experience activity on theme of primer lesson (optional)
- Introduction of key picture and key word
- New letter drills (analysis, synthesis, identification, contrast, word building)
- Functor drills as needed

- Story read silently by learner, then out loud by teacher, then out loud by learners in unison
- Reading and writing activities as needed.
- New letters, syllables and words written to reinforce reading, letter formation, spelling, and creative writing

The primers are particularly effective in linear thinking societies that are preliterate.

Teachers' guides

"A teacher's guide (or teaching instructions) is a supplement to the training that the teacher receives in the method that is used for literacy instruction. The guide will assure that the teacher appropriately applies the principles and techniques learned in the training as he or she is teaching the lessons." We have typically prepared a separate teachers manual that acts as a guide to go with the primers we have developed. We have also developed teacher's manuals for primers that someone else had written but for which they had never adequately trained teachers.

Reading teachers trained to teach from primers

We train teachers at three different levels. At this level the teachers are trained in how to use the primers we have designed. There is not a lot of reading theory taught. It is simply how to use the primers to teach someone (or a class) to read. The teachers would need to be literate themselves in order to take this training course but they would not need much education beyond that.

Transition/Bridge Primers

It has been the approach of the Literacy Department to use a Gudschinsky style Primer as the foundation of our literacy programs. Other agencies have found that for church based programs in non-print based cultures often a more whole language approach (WLA) based on the learning of Scriptures has been most effective in people learning to read. We have seen another use for this style of primers. We work in many places where the literacy rates among the people are quite high but in another language other than their own.

In these situations the people do not need to learn to read, they simply need to learn to read their own language. They need primers that act as a bridge between the reading skills they already have and their need to read their own language. The stories in a WLA primer allow them to proceed at their own level. They will learn how each of the sounds in their own language is represented through the course of the book. They will also learn how things such as tone, stress or discourse markers (punctuation) are represented.

The transition primers are based on 4-6 simple stories, ½ to a full page in length. Six to twelve sounds (more sounds are taught when they are from the same group of sounds, for example palatalized) are taught from each story. After the story a sound is introduced. There is a picture containing several picturable words with the sound in focus. Each word is labeled in the picture and then listed on the side. The words are then built to teach phonics and syllable skills. There is then typically a sentence or sentences containing the picturable words. A sentence(s) from the story with the sound in focus underlined each time it occurs follows. Words from the story sentence that are picturable are

illustrated and labeled. Finally there are word building drills for all the words from the story sentence that contain the focus sound.

There will be some variations on this basic format but this is the general template on which the lessons are built. Each day the teacher will read the story at least at the beginning and end of the class as well as the specific sentences in focus for the lesson. By the end of that set of lessons the student will be so familiar with the story they can “read” it even if they do not know all the letters yet. This helps better readers who do know most of the letters not to get frustrated and helps make later lessons easier for poorer readers (it is the idea behind multi-grade class rooms).

Transition Primers are necessary for more than just helping people transition into reading their own language. There are several sociolinguistic factors that make them necessary:

- Establish the orthography used for the Scripture as official
- Give the language the prestige necessary to gain the acceptance of the Scripture in the mother tongue (MT) as legitimate
- Tribal languages are often associated with Christianity (versus majority languages which are associated with the dominant religion – Hinduism/Islam/Buddhism). In many countries the majority language is promoted as a way of making the young people see the dominant religion in a positive light and Christianity, associated with the mother tongue, as backward. Giving the MT prestige also gives Christianity legitimacy.

As with the regular primers the transition primers are also accompanied by *Teachers’ guides* and *Teachers trained to teach from Transition/Bridge primers*

Old Testament Storybook Series

This series is written in simple language but has been edited by multiple consultants so that it is completely consistent with what they will be reading in Scripture. The series covers all the stories, characters or concepts from the O.T. that are mentioned in the N.T. Each book in the series of 4 (working on 2 more) gets progressively more difficult in concepts, vocabulary and discourse structure. The goal is to take them in their reading abilities from being “letter callers” to being able (though perhaps not with complete ease) to read at the level of their N.T. translation with understanding. The goal is to take them in their knowledge of the Scripture to a point where the O.T. concepts and stories are an aid in their understanding of the N.T. O.T. Storybooks are:

- Postprimer materials
- Designed for people who have completed a basic reading instruction program
- Focused on higher level comprehension skills and critical reading skills

The following is a summary of the contents and design of each of the books:

Book 1: Stories of Beginnings

This book is based on stories from Genesis. It introduces several key concepts including: sin, sacrifice, salvation and sovereignty. The stories are written in simple linear progression.¹ They are all event based. Relational ties between stories and characters are clearly stated.

Book 2: Stories of Moses

This book is based on stories from Exodus-Deuteronomy. It continues developing the concepts introduced in the first book but in the framework of God's work with the Nation of Israel and His law. The majority of the stories are still event based, linear progressions with clearly stated relationships, but there are stories that introduce different textual structures. For example:

- The story of the Passover is not linear. It begins with the importance of the Passover in the NT times and then returns to the setting of Moses for details about the actual event. This structure will be used repeatedly in the third book, but readers are introduced to it here.
- There are a number of stories surrounding the law that include event stories but are not event based.

This book also introduces them to the idea of subtext with the particular laws being introduced with the framework of the Law as a whole.

Book 3: Stories of Faith

This book is based on Hebrews 11 but draws from the stories of Joshua and Judges. The main themes are faith and forgiveness. The discourse structure of the book is significantly different from the first two. It is theme based. The relationship between the theme/teaching of an individual story and Scripture as a whole is clearly stated but not necessarily the relationships between the individual characters. Most of the individual stories are event based but begin with an introduction to a teaching. They proceed with the events of the story and how they hang upon the teaching, rather than beginning with the story itself.

Book 4: Stories of the Nation of Israel

This book could also be called the Kings and Prophets. The stories accomplish two main objectives:

- Give people an understanding of who ruled when, who prophesied when they were king and about what. It gives a clear (as clear as is possible) verbal time line of the kings and prophets. This is probably the least understood period of Bible time and yet the largest portion of the Bible. The attempt was to build a framework for future years of study on this section of the Bible.
- To set the stage for Christ's coming. It shows clearly the wickedness of the people and the inability of the Law to make people righteous. It also shows clearly that Christ's coming was a carefully orchestrated plan of God. The prophets described each stage of His life. By showing the prophet's importance in his (the prophet's) time period and his prophecies concerning the Messiah, this book bridges the gap between the Old and New Testament and builds anticipation for the receiving of the N.T.

¹ The only slight exception to this is the creation story. It is told in the same style as the Genesis account to enable people to better understand the Biblical account. The bigger picture is told and then the details of particular events (i.e. creation of male and female) are explained later.

Discursively it becomes progressively more difficult. It begins with simple linear event stories, but they have subsections. It contains oral narrative timelines, narratives that straddle time lines as well as concept based stories like “The Prophets.” Each of these discursive styles is necessary for reading the Bible and further study.

General: These stories are NOT simplified translations of particular texts. They begin with a list of all the references in Scripture that talk about the text. The story is a compilation and assimilation of all the Scriptural text regarding an event and its importance as well as commentary to aid in understanding. Every attempt has been made to prevent this from having the stories take a particular theological bias or viewpoint but that, of course, cannot be guaranteed.

The purposes of these books are many (in order of importance):

1. Improve reading skills
2. Provide people with the foundational knowledge to understand what they are reading in the N.T.
3. Promote the use of Scripture
4. Present the gospel clearly
5. Introduce people to the basic themes, concepts and doctrines of the Bible
6. Base for development of vernacular Sunday School materials

One of the major reasons given by researchers as to why literacy programs have failed is that there are not enough post-primer level materials to promote reading. This series has filled that gap in our program.

Advanced teacher training workshops

The workshop can be divided into two sections: how to use the Storybooks to 1) help people with limited literacy ability gain a foundation of skills necessary to be literate and 2) help people develop reading skills to the level they can understand, apply and even teach what they have read. A manual for the workshop is available but below is a brief summary of the two sections of the workshop.

Section 1: The teachers are asked to envision an elderly grandmother who would be embarrassed to go to a literacy class but could not read these books to her grandchildren. She may be able to pick out most of the letters, sign her name and maybe even struggle through reading simple, short sentences. How could they use the books in the setting of a Bible study to help her become literate enough to read the first book to her grandchildren? The section is divided into 3 subsections, how to use the storybooks to 1) get her comfortable with all the letters of the alphabet, 2) help her read and build words at a syllable level (necessary for comprehension), 3) help her learn high frequency and key words to speed her reading and increase comprehension

Section 2: The teachers are taught that there are higher-level comprehension skills that are necessary for them to use the Bible as outlined in 2 Timothy 3:16. These may not be skills they have mastered themselves. They are skills that many people do not have. In the US it is students that do not have these skills that comprise the biggest segment of those who drop out of school or do not go on to college. They need to teach their people these skills so they can have personal devotions, lead their

family in devotions, witness to a friend, participate in a Bible study or lead a Sunday School class. These comprehension skills are:

1. Ability to remember what has been read
2. Ability to retell what has been read
3. Ability to gain information and draw conclusions from what has been read

The teachers are taught what these skills are, why they are important and different activities they can apply to any lesson in the Bible Storybooks or any other Scripture text to teach these skills.

Writers' workshops²

These workshops are designed to take good readers and turn them into good writers. Reading is deciphering the text of others; it is a very different skill to be able to produce text of your own that can be deciphered and used/enjoyed by others. To this point Bibles International literacy program has included few if any materials to promote writing even at the most basic level. This is probably one of the greatest weaknesses as our program now stands.

The greatest flaw with our approach is we have not given national churches the skills they need to produce materials outside of the involvement of Bibles International. This is a problem on two fronts: they are dependent on Bibles International's resources and personnel and Bibles International is very restricted in the kinds of materials it will develop so the people are very limited in the kinds of text that can be produced for them. Training the national believers how to write, how to write for an audience, how to produce materials for their churches, etc. will give them all the literacy training they need to develop as a church outside of Bibles International's ministry. This level is still in the planning and implementation stages but preliminary plans are to cover:

- The basics of writing (as needed)
- The styles of writing
- What makes a good writer
- How to write for a particular audience and purpose
- How to write and develop Church curriculum

It is hoped that these workshops will be key in the encouragement of local development of Sunday School materials.

Linguistics

Purpose of Linguistics:

- to improve the consistency and accuracy of translated Scripture and
- to enable believers to use the Scripture as the foundation for producing materials for their church.

To accomplish these goals we:

- assist in language research

² We are still in the development stages of this program. The Writers' Handbook Workshops are the first step but we are still trying to move past instruction in grammar to creative writing.

- develop and modifies orthographies
- trains translators and Read and Review Committees
- develops Writers' Handbooks and trains nationals to use and teach them
- Conduct spelling and morpheme consistency checks in Bible translations and literacy materials.

In doing language research and developing orthographies we are often not producing something but answering questions

Language research

Study what has been already produced for or discovered about the language. Is it adequate? Is it accurate? Can we build on it? What more is necessary? Is anything necessary? What can we learn to help us in what we are setting out to do?

Orthographies

Is there already an orthography? If not, what kind of orthography do the people want? Has anyone tried using it? If there is an orthography are the people satisfied with it? Is it worth the risk trying to change anything? Do we have a thorough understanding of it so we can use it?

Training materials for Translators & Read and Review Committees

We work with the translation consultants to train translators. Our job as the linguistics instructors is to help the translators understand their own language so they can translate the truth clearly in their own language. We help them to study the sounds of their language and anticipate any problems they might encounter in trying to spell words. We help them to work through morphemes in their language and whether or not they should be suffixes/prefixes/infixes. We help them identify how/if they mark grammatical structures such as subject clause, object clause, tense, degree of probability, location and make sure they write them consistently and use them to translate the original text accurately and clearly.

Writers' Handbooks and Teachers' Manual for Handbooks

The underlying purpose of a Writers' Handbook is to help the translation committee to agree on how the language will be written. This enables a diverse group of people to edit the Bible translation in a consistent manner. It also means the end product will be much clearer and will facilitate the development of the concordance, glossary, Bible dictionary, etc.

In addition it serves to:

- Involve & interest people in the translation that may not be otherwise interested (lawyers, teachers, doctors, etc. not just pastors)
- Promote the acceptance and use of the Bible translation
- Allow the translation to be an example of good writing in their language
- Evangelize those outside of the church, particularly in areas where tracts are restricted

- Increase literacy within the language group
- Encourage people to write further materials in their language (such as Bible studies, Sunday School materials, curriculum, etc).

The Teachers' Manual that may accompany a Writers' Handbook allows nationals to teach the writing of their own language to others. Often it is used by teachers in Bible Colleges and schools to teach students about their own language similar to how a grammar and/or writing book would be used to teach in the proper writing of English in the US.

Linguistics Checks (spelling, morphemes) for translations

Spelling Checks:

We are currently building spell checks into Bibledit, our editing/word processing software builds a dictionary as part of the translation process. There may still be questions on how a word should be spelled in the dictionary. For older projects that were begun before we started projects in Bibledit, we provide a manual spell checking using numerical, alphabetical and reverse alphabetical word lists from the translation (In the example of Chakma 308 pages of words that are checked 3 times). The linguistics consultant goes through the lists and marks any possible irregularities and then either they or a translation consultant will go through them with the committee to make spelling decisions. The translators or typists are then responsible for going back and making the necessary changes.

Morphology Checks:

Morphemes are the smallest unit of language that has meaning. It may or may not be a word. For example "hitters" is 3 morphemes a verb meaning 'hit', a nominalizer to make the verb a noun and the plural marker. Languages have to decide based on phonology and/or usage, what morphemes should be separate words and which should be suffixes/prefixes/infixes. Once those decisions have been made, the translation needs to be checked to make certain they are followed consistently.

Connie is the Literacy and Linguistics Coordinator for Bibles International. She has worked with Bibles International since 1993. As an MK she served in Brazil and the Philippines, and as an adult she has worked with over 32 language groups throughout S.E. Asia, South America and Africa. She and her husband, Birch, have twin eight year old boys. She enjoys the balancing act of many women - wife, mother, teacher, ministry – as well as managing short-term teams and equipping others for service.