

7.5.4. VERNACULAR EDUCATION, A CASE STUDY: IRIAN JAYA

Joan Rule

As with the Australian Administration in Papua New Guinea, so also on the western side of the island neither the Netherlands nor more latterly the Indonesian Administration has made it a matter of policy to attempt the provision of vernacular education in the schools. In the *Handbook on Netherlands New Guinea* published in 1958, the 'Annual Report of the Governing Body to the United Nations' summarises the Netherlands Government's viewpoint:

the almost complete absence of sizable areas in which one and the same language is spoken renders it hard to apply the accepted rule that the vernacular be used in elementary education Merely for the sake of convenience has the Government at some time in the past decided ... to employ the Malayan language ... as a language for general intercourse in schools In the more advanced grades of all schools other than village schools [writer's note: after Grade 3] the Dutch language is used as the language of instruction. (New Guinea Institute 1958:50-1)

The first school in Irian Jaya was actually a Mission school, established by Protestant missionaries on the north coast in 1857 shortly after their arrival, but although it was not till 1898 that 'the Indies budget included a sum ... for the establishment of two permanent posts in New Guinea' (i.e. the then Dutch New Guinea) (Souter 1963:129), and some time afterwards that the Administration ventured into education, both the Protestant Missions on the north coast and the Catholic Missions on the south coast had been conducting their schools using Malay-speaking teachers and with Malay as the medium of instruction. The Netherlands Administration instituted a system whereby Mission schools could receive a subsidy and be regularly inspected or be unsubsidised and not subject to inspection. The subsidised village schools were of three categories, A: four years, B: 3 years, and C: two years, but in

all of these, Malay was used as the medium of instruction. The number of children in these subsidised schools is given in the afore-mentioned Handbook as 25,365 in 1957, while the total number of school children (subsidised and unsubsidised) is given as 50,000. That is, almost an equal number of children were in unsubsidised schools. The Handbook comments:

In the more primitive districts where the first contacts with the population have been made only recently, the Roman Catholic and Protestant Missions maintain unsubsidized small schools ... here religion, flute playing and some very elementary subjects are taught. (New Guinea Institute 1958:48)

However, besides the religion and the flute playing, reading and writing in their own language were among the subjects taught to children in a number of those newly opened areas. When the Indonesian Government took over in 1963, Government schools were maintained and subsidies were still extended to Mission schools. All teachers were to be Indonesian, as had been the Dutch policy with Malay and Dutch, and the medium of instruction was to be Indonesian. Unsubsidised schools have been gradually phased out. Even in newly entered areas, such as the ranges east of Mt Juliana, where the people are still in the first phase of contact, the writer witnessed the first semblance of a regular school being set up by personnel of the Unevangelised Fields Mission (in response to requests from the people) with Indonesian-speaking Irianese who were teaching in Indonesian.

There has been no veto at all by the Government, however, on the holding of vernacular literacy classes among adults and young adults, and in the Highlands, these have been widespread and successful (see chapter 7.2.5. in this volume, entitled 'Vernacular Literacy in Irian Jaya'). The Government has also not opposed in any way the establishment of Bible Institutes among the Christian adults, and these have provided vernacular education for many of the Christian leaders in the Highlands communities. Bible Institutes teach not only the Bible but also the social sciences, written expression, mathematics, Indonesian, health and hygiene and whatever subjects are considered valuable in providing a good background for the future ministers and pastors of the church. The Dani Bible Institute at Mulia, established in 1964, now has on the staff as well as three Americans, three Dani lecturers, who all received their original education and training at the Institute. So that, vernacular education, while limited in its scope and extent, does exist among the adult tribal groups even though in the schools the education is through the medium of the metropolitan language.

7.5.4. VERNACULAR EDUCATION, A CASE STUDY: IRIAN JAYA

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NEW GUINEA INSTITUTE

1958 *Handbook on Netherlands New Guinea.* Rotterdam: New Guinea
Institute.

SOUTER, G.

1963 *New Guinea: The Last Unknown.* Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

PART 7.6.

INTRUSIVE LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

