

The Newsletter of the  
Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea  
PO Box 418, Ukarumpa via Lae

November 1988

1988 Annual Conference

The 1988 annual conference of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea was held 29 June - 1 July at the National Sports Institute in Goroka. The overall theme was 'Language and the Media.' Papers related to this theme included analyses of advertising and birthday announcements in newspapers, the use of vernacular literacy by the Coffee Board, the development of language courses at UPNG, and general discussions of language policy by the media. Student papers and papers on general linguistic topics rounded out the presentations. If you would like a listing of all the papers presented, request one from the secretary.

At the annual general meeting which followed the conference, the following officers were elected.

President - Otto Nekitel

Secretary - John Clifton

Treasurer - Colin Barron

Members - Sam Brandt, Sue Holzknecht, Dicks Thomas

Editor - Karl Franklin (articles)

Tom Dutton (reviews)

Follow-up to Language and the Media

Shortly after the 1988 conference, Otto Nekitel spoke on NBC's Analysis of Current Affairs. As reported in The PNG Times of 21-27 July, Otto criticised the news media for 'not having any clear-cut philosophy or policy in black and white on what functional languages to use.' He went on to state that:

'This lack of policy leaves individual media organisations to adopt what appears to be an ad hoc practice whereby new, advertisements and other non-musical programmes are done about 98 percent of the time in English when we know that English is spoken by less than 20 percent of this country's population. Obviously we seem to have forgotten our priorities and objectives of reaching out to the vast majority of Papua New Guinea's rural and peripheral urban population of illiterate and semi-literate who are not well informed of any vital public information...'

If you would like a copy of the entire article, including a reply from the editor of Wantok Niuspepa, contact the secretary.

Language and Linguistics in Melanesia

Volume 18 of LLM (for 1987) has been posted. The editor reports that volume 19 should be ready in December 1988 or January 1989. This will bring LLM up to schedule. The executive committee expresses its appreciation to John Verhaar, Karl Franklin, and Tom Dutton for their work in making this possible.

The editor is also accepting papers for inclusion in volume 20 of LLM to be published in 1989. He would be especially pleased to receive papers which were presented at the 1988 annual con-

ference. Papers can be sent to Karl Franklin at the address at the top of this Hebou.

### Executive Meeting

The executive committee of the Society met in Lae 9 September. The major items of discussion were the report from the president including the draft submission regarding the PNG Language Development Authority, the 1989 conference, and society publications LLM and Hebou.

### 1989 Annual Conference

The annual conference for the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea will be held at the University of PNG in Port Moresby from 28-30 June 1989. The theme 'Are our languages dying?', was chosen because it brings together linguists working in the political areas, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, comparative linguistics, applied linguistics, and teachers. As usual, papers on other aspects of Melanesian linguistics will also be welcome. The conference will coincide with the TESLA conference also to be held in Port Moresby.

Further information, including registration forms, call for papers, and information regarding accommodations for participants from outside Port Moresby will be forthcoming in Hebou 23, due to appear in March or April 1989.

### PNG Language Development Authority

At the 1987 annual general meeting, a working committee was appointed to draft a submission for the Minister for Culture, Civil Aviation and Tourism to set up a PNG language development body to be attached to the Department of Language and Literature at UPNG. The resulting draft submission has not been presented to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or the National Cultural Council. The executive committee has since recommended that the Language Department at UPNG is not the most suitable place for establishing the proposed PNG Language Development Authority as outlined in the draft submission, and that instead it would be better placed under the National Cultural Council. The draft submission is being included in this issue of Hebou for members to read preparatory to discussion at the 1989 conference. Comments by Society members on the draft submission are encouraged, and can be sent to the secretary.

DRAFT SUBMISSION  
to  
The National Cultural Council  
and  
The Ministry of Culture and Tourism

#### Background:

Economic and social development in the rural areas of Papua New Guinea depends heavily on PNG languages like Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu to pass information about development programmes. But without any standards for spelling and the creation of new words, these languages become cumbersome to use, lead to misunderstanding and slow down the development process.

This submission proposes that PNG follow the lead of countries like Indonesia and Tanzania where an approved body has been set

up to promote the standardisation of spelling and the use of proper guidelines for introducing new technical terms into the key languages of rural development.

The kind of attention to language development will considerably increase the effectiveness of development efforts in the rural areas of the country. If development messages are properly understood, programmes have a much better chance of being successfully implemented.

The idea is to use provisions under the existing Culture Development Act to attach to the appropriate department of UPNG (after restructuring) an officially recognised PNG Language Development Authority. Specific projects sponsored by the Authority in promoting its objectives would seek external funding. A Director and secretary would be sufficient skeletal staff to solicit the outside funding.

#### OBJECTIVES:

The key objectives of the authority would be to:

1. promote increased standardisation of spelling for PNG languages
2. promote guidelines for the development of new terminology for PNG languages
3. promote guidelines for improving the quality of translations and interpretations in Papua New Guinea
4. liaise with other related bodies in the region in general and in Melanesia in particular

#### CONSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS:

The National Goals of the Constitution foresee a multi-lingual society and direct that reading and writing be developed in PNG languages as well as English. The Third National Goal on Equality and Participation calls for:

"all persons and governmental bodies to endeavor to achieve universal literacy in Pisin, Hiri Motu, or English and in "tok ples" or "ita eda tano gado" (1.2.12, p. 17)

However, reading is based on predictability so that it is extremely difficult to read a language where the spelling changes and technical terms are borrowed wildly from foreign languages. A PNG Language Development Authority would help by encouraging standardised spellings and standardised terminology that would be predictable and easier to read.

The constitution under the Cultural Development Act established the National Cultural Council to...

"formulate and implement a program for the preservation and development of all aspects of culture and art in the country" (Chapt. 153.20.14)

And Article 20 of Chapter 153 further empowers the National Cultural Council to establish national, provincial and local cultural institutions or cultural centers. With language being the sine qua non of culture, this provision of the Act provides the appropriate body for establishing the authority.

## STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

The value of placing the Authority within the context of the University is that it could depend on the larger institution for minor support services rather than creating new infrastructure. A further advantage is that research projects at the University (such as the current dictionary projects for Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu) can be easily tied into achieving the objectives of the Authority.

As such, the Authority would be in a good position to attract external grant funding, as long as there is a skeleton staff who can commit time to developing that funding base. Minimal funding of this kind is important because it provides external funding agencies with the evidence they require that the Government is committed to the objectives of the Authority.

It is therefore recommended that a skeleton staff consisting of a Coordinator (Level One) and one secretary (Grade Three) be funded positions.

## ALIGNMENT WITH CURRENT GOVERNMENT DIRECTIONS:

Current Government policy focuses on development in the agricultural sector.

Basic information associated with agricultural development must make use of PNG languages. Consider the heavy use of Tok Pisin by the Coffee Development Agency in assisting rural coffee growers. Standardised spelling and standardised terms for talking about the coffee rust and coffee rehabilitation are crucial to getting the right information to the growers. The same kind of standardisation is needed for developing the other major commodities of the agriculture sector.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a. That a PNG Language Development Authority be formed under Section 20, Chapter 153 of the Constitution in order to:
  - promote the standardisation of spelling for PNG languages
  - promote the standardisation of new technical terms for PNG languages
  - promote improved standards of translations and interpretations from PNG languages
  - liaise with other related language development bodies in the region
- b. That this Authority be attached to UPNG's Department of Language and Literature (or the appropriate counterpart in the rationalised structure)
- c. That future National Cultural Council submissions for budget funding include salaries for a Level One coordinator and a Grade Three secretary for the PNG Language Development Authority.