

# ANYI LITERACY PROGRAM

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The linguist has a significant role in the battle against illiteracy. Adult literacy in the mother-tongue faces three problems - lack of motivation, variety of dialects and lack of materials. Among the Anyi of Côte d'Ivoire, these problems have been tackled with the help of some government funding, local committees and consultant help. Basic arithmetic is needed for simple book-keeping and local business deals, and so the teaching of arithmetic, with its restricted set of symbols, has provided an imaginative bridge to the teaching of reading. The teaching of reading and writing is based on the Gudschinsky method. Trained teachers are beginning to produce literature, necessary to maintain motivation.

Le linguiste joue un rôle important dans la lutte contre l'analphabétisme. L'alphabétisation des adultes dans la langue maternelle rencontre trois problèmes: la manque de motivation, la diversité des dialectes et la manque de matériaux. On a abordé ces problèmes parmi les Anyi avec l'aide financière du gouvernement, des comités locaux et des conseillers. Les gens ont besoin de mathématique du base pour la comptabilité simple, et pour la conduite des affaires locales. On s'est servi de l'enseignement du mathématique et l'ensemble restreint de ses symboles comme pont imaginaire à l'enseignement de la lecture. On emploie la méthode Gudschinsky pour l'enseignement de la lecture et l'écriture. Des enseignants formés commencent à produire une littérature, qui est indispensable au maintien de la motivation.

## O. INTRODUCTION

During this International Year of Literacy, it is appropriate to consider what contribution members of the West African Linguistic Society can make to promote the use of African languages in national development, and to assist the large illiterate population to overcome this handicap. One obvious answer is to get involved in applying linguistic research to the development of literacy materials and programs for the great number of languages which still have few or no written materials.

This paper<sup>1</sup> describes several aspects of an adult literacy program developed for the Anyi language in Côte d'Ivoire. Anyi is spoken by about a half million people living in the southeastern region of the country and more than 100,000 people in neighbouring Ghana. The majority of Anyi adults in Côte d'Ivoire are illiterate and many do not speak French, the official language. While the government has made steady progress in teaching French to young people in the public school system at great expense, very little has been done to help adults and young people who have not had the opportunity to attend school.

Since 1985, however, the government has sponsored experimental adult literacy programs in three languages, including the one here described for the Sanvi dialect of Anyi, located in the Department of Aboisso. Five literacy centers were created and a central committee. This program was originally designed to be bilingual, with initial literacy instruction to be given in Anyi followed by language learning and literacy in French. So far, only the Anyi phase has been tested since the French materials have not yet been prepared.

In addition to the Sanvi dialect, a similar program has been started in the Morofa dialect located in the Department of Bonogouanou. The Anyi literacy program is a joint effort of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Youth and Sports, the Institute of Applied Linguistics of the University of Abidjan and the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented to the 19th West African Languages Congress at the University of Ghana, Legon, April 2-6, 1990.

## 1. SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ASPECTS

Two major problems face mother-tongue literacy efforts in the Anyi language area. First, there is the problem of language attitudes. The government of Côte d'Ivoire has continued the French colonial policy of promoting education exclusively in French. The government has no policy for the development and use of African languages in education. The Institute of Applied Linguistics assisted by SIL has been authorised to prepare materials such as primers for the eventual introduction of African languages into school programs, but so far only a few of the more than 50 languages spoken in Ivory Coast have a primer or other written materials available, mostly for lack of funding. The experimental bilingual programs in Anyi and two other languages have received very little support from the government. This influences the motivation of the population. Without a serious commitment on the part of the government to adult literacy and the use of African languages in education, it is very difficult to interest people in mother-tongue literacy. Most of those motivated to participate in the Anyi program are Christians who want to read the Bible and hymn-books which have been prepared in the language.

The second problem is that Anyi has several major dialects and political divisions. In addition to the border between Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana which divides the group into French and English-speaking areas, there are a number of independent traditional kingdoms. While there is a fairly good level of mutual intelligibility between the dialects, it has not been possible to use one dialect for the whole group. Most Anyi speakers recognize the Sanvi dialect as the most conservative and highly inflected form of the language, but with no government policy on language standardization, each dialect area prefers to write its own speech forms rather than adopt another one. Ivory Coast has adopted orthography conventions which are not the same as those used in Ghana. So, for the moment, several orthographies are being used in order to help people get started in reading and writing in their native dialects. A comparative lexicon is in preparation and committees from several dialect areas are keeping in contact with each other to resolve orthography problems and promote literature development.

## 2. FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS

Adult literacy must be functional. That is why the initial phase of the Anyi program begins with arithmetic before the alphabet (Burmeister 1987). Many adult illiterates feel incapable of learning to read and write in French since they don't speak the language well. They don't have the time and money to spend years in school like their children. They manage to operate in the adult world without literacy, even though they are increasingly exposed to embarrassment and exploitation. They see no point in learning to read and write in their mother-tongue since there is practically nothing available to read and no immediate social or economic advantage.

They are interested, however, in accurate calculation of their income and expenses. Most adults can count money and do mental arithmetic of prices in the marketplace. In the Anyi area, most men are engaged in production of one or more cash crops, especially coffee, cocoa, palm oil and bananas. Many participate in local cooperatives. Women are responsible for the family food crops, and sell their surplus in the market. Almost every day people do business with wandering salesmen or in stores located in the towns or cities. These and other activities involve them with numbers and basic arithmetic.

By offering a short course which teaches people how to write numbers and do calculations on paper as well as with electronic calculators, many adults can be won over to investing the time and effort necessary to go on learning the alphabet. In the basic arithmetic course one only has to learn how to write ten basic numbers (0-9) and a few operation symbols such as +, -, = etc. It takes a much longer time to master the Anyi alphabet which has 27 letters to represent 39 different sounds, plus several accents to mark tone, not to mention punctuation marks. Each letter also has printed and cursive forms in upper and lower case.

The experience gained in learning to read and write numbers and doing simple calculations such as  $4 + 5 = 9$  is useful preparation for learning how to read and write words and sentences. The language system transcribed by numbers and the system written with letters both require similar skills for encoding and decoding, such as relating written symbols to words, left-to-right orientation, control of hand movements etc. Success in learning basic arithmetic reading and writing skills can encourage previously illiterate people to have more confidence in themselves and their ability to master other new literacy skills. The short course in basic arithmetic thus serves as a useful bridge or pre-primer introduction to reading and writing with the alphabet. The arithmetic course also has the advantage that it can be taught in any language using the same symbols. This allows introducing the official language right along with the local language.

The primers developed for the Anyi literacy program follow the Gudschinsky method. This eclectic method, which has been described in publications such as Gudschinsky (1973), Barnwell (1979), Lee (1982) and Willetts (1983) has a relatively simple lesson plan which facilitates teacher training. Each lesson begins with a picture related to a key word. Since Anyi consists primarily of words with CV syllables, the key word is broken down to a key syllable and then to the vowel in this syllable. New syllables are then built up from the letters already learned.

Next, the same syllables are compared and contrasted with each other. Certain syllables are then selected which combine to make new words, especially those which will be used later in the lesson. In the Anyi primer, this word-building exercise is written out in the format of an addition problem, for example: **ba + ka = baka** 'tree'. There is often a grammatical or tone exercise, and then a simple narrative text or dialogue for developing reading fluency and comprehension skills.

These texts do not introduce new ideas such as agricultural techniques or community development themes. That can be done in post-primer reading materials. Rather, the primer texts deal with common everyday situations familiar to most new readers such as going to the market, food preparation, field work, etc. At the end of the Anyi primer, traditional proverbs and a folktale are introduced. Each lesson normally introduces one new letter only. Every fifth lesson is planned as a review.

Each lesson includes writing exercises in addition to reading. During the primer course, only the printed forms of the letters are taught. Both upper and lower case letters are introduced from the first lesson. Cursive forms are taught in the post-primer course. The post-primer course also encourages people to write personal letters, and combines arithmetic and writing for practical applications such as personal bookkeeping using an agenda calendar.

The second phase of the program is intended to be conducted in French, but using translation in Anyi whenever needed. The materials and methods for the French course have not yet been developed by the government. As an interim solution, some testing has

been done using the primers developed for primary schools. These attractive textbooks have a method and format very similar to the Gudschinsky primers. Many parents appear to be interested in learning to read these textbooks, so that they can eventually help their children.

These primers, however, need to be supplemented with reading material more appropriate for adults. There also needs to be provision for practical applications of writing and arithmetic in French, such as personal and business letter-writing, learning to fill out French forms at the post office, banks, government offices and various commercial documents. A body of bilingual literature is in preparation to meet the post-primer reading needs. It is estimated that new readers need to master several hundred pages of texts graded from easy to difficult in order to become life-long readers. A cultural review magazine, plays and booklets on health and agricultural themes are among the titles to be published as soon as funds are available. Ideally, it is best to have the literature available before starting literacy classes. Where literature is lacking, more emphasis must be put on getting the learners to write it for themselves.

### 3. ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS

Literacy programs are very complex and require good organization, planning and adequate finances. The Anyi Sanvi program was organized along the lines of local and regional development associations common in Côte d'Ivoire. Each local literacy center as well as the regional committee has a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer elected by those taking part in the program. There is also provision for a group of advisors made up of community leaders. The author of this paper serves as a linguistic consultant and helps with training writers and production of literature. In the Morofu area there is a committee made up of volunteer literacy teachers. There are also women's groups which are organized as farming cooperatives in a number of towns which have invited the literacy committee to work with them in an integrated rural development project.

The teachers are mostly young people who have completed elementary school as a minimum requirement. They are given intensive training in writing in Anyi and teaching the various literacy materials. In the Sanvi area, the government has provided a small compensation for their work which consists of conducting classes in the evenings. In most towns, classes are held for about two hours five days a week during the dry season. The central committee is trying to attract development investment so the committee can ensure continuation of the program if and when the government subsidies stop.

Teachers in the Morofu dialect have been serving without pay, and work with just a few people in private since they do not yet have funds to print their teaching materials. They hope to be salaried with profits from the farming cooperatives organized by the women in the area. These women's groups are eager for literacy training to help them better manage their business affairs. Several NGO development agencies are also planning to help these women's groups and appreciate the need for literacy work.

These teachers are the main resource for production of literature. In addition to transcribing recorded material and free composition, some of these young people are getting training and experience in translation as well. Here, too, linguistics can be applied to literacy development. The production of good quality reading material is crucial to motivating the population to take an interest in mother-tongue literacy. At present there are two literature production centers in the Anyi area. It is hoped that

production and sale of literature may eventually provide employment for several literacy workers. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to get start-up funds for such literature.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Linguists can play an important role in helping the illiterate masses of Africa through literacy applications of their research. One of the reasons why the government chose the Sanvi dialect for this experimental program was because considerable linguistic research had been done in the language, and the basic literacy materials prepared in advance. The elaboration of an orthography guide, lexicon and primer, among other materials needed for training teachers and writers, was useful not only for preparing the literacy program, but also stimulated further linguistic research. Literacy provides an excellent laboratory for testing, not only the orthography, but also the phonological and grammatical analysis.

It is very satisfying to see many Anyi people make the breakthrough to literacy, thanks to the mother-tongue literacy approach. This is an important step for them towards enhancing their dignity and better integration into national life and development. It is also satisfying to know that the Anyi language now has a written form to enhance the conservation and sharing of oral traditions. Several people in the neighbouring Nzema and Abure language groups have been encouraged by the Anyi example to develop an adult literacy program as well. May others also be stimulated to help in this immense but rewarding literacy task.

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Received, April 1990.