Comparing literate and oral cultures with a view to improving understanding of students from oral traditions: an autoethnographic approach

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COMPARING LITERATE AND ORAL CULTURES

WITH A VIEW TO IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING

OF STUDENTS FROM ORAL TRADITIONS:

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

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By

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Abstract

In his book *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong describes the difference between cultures that have never been exposed to literature and those that have been highly influenced by literature and literacy. He suggests that such learners have a different “consciousness” as a result of their life experience. This notion is later confirmed by research on brain structures that shows preliterate people having developed very different structures from those of highly literate people. In this paper, I describe my own process of becoming literate in a highly literate culture. By comparison, I cite my 34-year experience living with a people group in Papua New Guinea from the time they had no exposure to literature to their present literate state. The research on teaching literacy to people labeled non-literate suggests that a greater understanding of the values and traditions of these people is necessary to help them, not only to learn English, but to learn the culture and values of education in their new environment. My conclusions discuss the need for teachers of English to be aware of the values, learning models, process of learning, and even potential brain structures found in people from non-literate cultures. Adjustments need to be made accordingly when teaching English to students with no formal education.
Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Dr. LaVona Reeves for her help in developing a vision for this thesis as well as consulting wisely and expertly on every chapter and idea. Her counsel allowed me to write in my area of interest and, at the same time, create a new thesis model. By comparing my own literacy narrative with an ethnographical account of my experience in another country, I trust I have been able to describe some of the differences between oral and literate culture. Within the Eastern Washington University Masters of Arts program for Teaching English to speakers of other languages, I have been able to learn new concepts, and I have had an opportunity to articulate the learning about literacy and teaching from my earlier years of life.

I also acknowledge my debt of gratitude to the Folopa people of Papua New Guinea for their patience and kindness to me over many years, as I learned their culture and language. Without that experience, I would not be aware of the significant differences between literate and oral societies.

My gratitude also is extended to the staff of the Adult Education Center in Spokane, Washington. Having the opportunity to do an internship there as well as tutoring students with little formal education has been very enlightening and has provided insights for this paper. The staff at the AEC, particularly Kathy Laise and Melissa McNabb, have been very helpful.
# Table of Contents

Abstract iv
Acknowledgements v
Table of Figures viii
Preface ix

Chapter 1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
- Living with the Folopa people
- Oral culture
- Language learning
- The literacy program
- Faulty assumptions
- A new learning model
- Assumptions
- Rationale
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Overview

Chapter 2 Literature Review .................................................................................................. 33
- Orality and Immigration
- The difficulties low-education immigrants face
- Orality
- Brain science
- Recommendations

Chapter 3 Becoming literate in the United States ................................................................. 44
- American literate culture
- Listening
- Metalinguistics and grammar
- Reading
- Writing
- Learning
- Memory

Chapter 4 Literacy in an oral culture .................................................................................. 62
- Foke
- The long journey to literacy
- Cultural pressures
• Cultural change

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections .................................................................77

Chapter 6 Conclusion ........................................................................................91

References .......................................................................................................... 96

Appendix A .........................................................................................................103

Appendix B .........................................................................................................116

Curriculum Vitae ...............................................................................................125
Table of Figures

Figure 1. The beare tree, commonly known as Strangler Fig (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 2. Map of Papua New Guinea. (Photo: Google Images)

Figure 3. Limestone ridges and peaks. (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 4. Part of a language map for the Gulf Province of PNG (Photo: SIL International)

Figure 5. Folopa men dressed for a feast. (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 6. Pig tied to post with a harika. (Photo: Anderson archive)

Figure 7. Our house in th middle of the long, narrow ridge. (Anderson archives)

Figure 8. The first Folopa primer. (Anderson, 1975)

Figure 9. My husband, Neil, teaching the first class. (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 10. The first page of the new primer (Anderson, 1975)

Figure 11. Some of the men in the first literacy class. (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 12. Village men sitting around the translation table (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 13. Awiaume Ali reading aloud as he sat on the front porch. (Photo: SIL International)

Figure 14. Awiaume Ali trying to read with Hweare. (Photo: SIL International)

Figure 15. Awiaume teaching another woman to read (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 16. Story and picture by Michael (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 17. Folopa men writing their hunting stories (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 18. A typical dape Men’s house in a Folopa village. (Photo: Anderson archives)

Figure 19. The first class of students in the Fukuta village school (Photo: Anderson archives)
Preface

This thesis describes a period of time longer than most readers will have encountered in the average Master’s theses. Since I will be 72 years of age when this paper is completed, I am including observations from my life experience that span most of those years.

The first 25 years were spent in the United States. Growing up, my family life could be characterized by an unstable stability. That is, my family life became destabilized by divorce and poverty, but it had a degree of stability owing to living in the same general area of Spokane, Washington for the whole time. Another stabilizing factor through it all was my church that welcomed me and gave me a sense of identity and belonging.

I had no cross-cultural experience, nor had I ever encountered a foreigner (other than my mother) or even a foreign language speaker until well into my teen years. In high school, I studied Spanish but had no other contact with real Spanish speakers. Some inner urge, however, made me very curious about other cultures and languages. I loved listening to men and women who had ventured into the world as they related their stories of challenge and ministry. I became determined to join the ranks of those who traveled across seas and continents to be involved in similar adventures.

My first year of university study was a disaster. Just going across the state to Seattle Pacific College as a recent high school graduate found me in an emotional crisis. Culture shock and unpreparedness for the rigors of college life discouraged me from continuing my education at that time.
Fortunately, I married soon after that year and did not have to face the challenges of college life. However, it had always been my husband’s and my goal as a couple to have a career serving a needy people group. After five years of marriage, he decided to train for Bible translation and we joined an organization doing that kind of work. I thought that I would just be a mother to my two small children, and my husband would be the main worker. To my surprise, the organization required me to train along with my husband by taking the same courses. I did not know that translation work required a knowledge of linguistics and anthropology. With fear and trembling, I set off for the University of Washington in Seattle and, in taking the courses, discovered my love for language and linguistics. Two summers of full time, graduate-level courses showed me that perhaps I was not such a bad student after all.

After a five-month training experience in the jungles of southern Mexico—where I was finally face-to-face with people of a different culture—I determined that, despite all my fears, this was the work I wanted to do. Spiders, snakes, cockroaches, isolation were not the worst things that could happen to a person. Later, I would discover that there were other hard things, but I felt I was finally ready to go out into the unknown.

We left the United States headed for the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in March 1972. After only a few weeks in the country, I became seriously ill with a rare reaction to an antimalarial drug which all members were required to take to prevent malaria. I came very close to dying as a result. The recovery during my three months in the hospital was painful and slow, but I did get back to full health. In April 1973, we were released to start work among the Folopa speaking people in the Southern Highlands Province.
The Folopa language is spoken by approximately 3000 people living in the Kerabi and Pepike census divisions of the Kagua sub-district of the Southern Highlands Province and the Kikori sub-district of the Gulf Province. It is a member of the Teberan language family, the only other member of which is Dadibi language in the Mount Karamui area of the Chimbu Province.

The language area is bounded on the north by the Wiru language, on the east by the Dadibi and Pawaia languages, on the south by languages of the Kiwaian family, on the southwest by languages of the East Kikorian family, on the west by the Sau language, on the northwest by Pole, the South Kewa dialect of the Kewa language.

Geographically the language is spoken in an area bounded on the north by the Erave river (or just north of the Erave river), on the east by Lake Tebera, and on the south by the Sirebi and Sireru rivers extending down to the head waters of the Aiowa river. It is bounded roughly on the west by Mt. Murray.

In the context of our work in TPNG (which became Papua New Guinea in 1975), I was able to compile words in the Folopa language that became the basis for the creation of the first alphabet. No alphabet had, as yet, been devised. These words, written down using the International Phonetic Alphabet, were analyzed for the patterns indicating the underlying phonemic sounds which would become symbols in the new alphabet. This analysis resulted in a phonological statement for Folopa written as a technical linguistic paper. Other papers written included a description of the anthropology, a grammar written as a language learning manual, and a paper on verb serialization. Work on literacy materials is described in Chapter 1.

In 1989, during a twelve-month break from life in Papua New Guinea, newfound confidence created the energy to keep pursuing education. I took classes at Eastern Washington University for the school year and was able to complete my Bachelor of Arts
degree. Using my training courses and experience overseas, I was able to obtain credit for life experience which brought my credits earned to just enough to graduate early in 1991.

In the following years, I was able to be part of an extension program in social science through Azusa Pacific University located in Azusa, California, and received a Master’s Degree in Leadership Studies in 1999.

The courses were taught each summer by professors sent from the university to several foreign countries in a program called Operation Impact. Concentrating on personal growth and leadership, each class was very stimulating and helpful for me to move beyond my introverted personality and fear of failure. I was challenged to do things I had never before attempted, like being a retreat speaker or running for elected office in our SIL Branch’s administration. I even gave a nine-minute speech to twenty thousand young people at a conference in Illinois.

At the conclusion of my degree program at APU, I wrote a book that was published by Chosen Books, a division of Baker Book House in Grand Rapids, MI. It is called *Do You Know What You Are Doing, Lord?* In my book, I describe the difficulties of living in an undeveloped culture where life was very raw. Death, disease, and pain were all around me, as well as spiders, snakes, dirt, bad smells, pigs, and hurting people. This was a lot to deal with and called for resources that were beyond my own ability to provide. Some hard lessons had to be learned about trusting God and finding strength to finish the goal.

I didn’t know it would take 34 years, but somehow, I made it to the end. I look back on those years and can appreciate all that I experienced and learned about relating to people groups with no previous exposure to reading or writing. Introducing them to the
world of literature was one of the high points of my career and no doubt has influenced
my decision to delve more deeply into the teaching of English as an additional language.

The experience of working with this people group gave me an awareness of the
enormous difference between the formally educated, literate world and those people of
the non-formally educated world, also known as oral culture people. I know that my
awareness of that difference would be merely academic had I not lived for many years in
the situation where people who had never held a book before were attempting to become
literate.

Following my final departure from Papua New Guinea in 2007, I was assigned to
work at the Canada Institute of Linguistics, the Canadian branch of Summer Institute of
Linguistics training school. CanIL makes up the Linguistics Department at Trinity
Western University in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. For two school years I helped
with administrative duties and furthered my education with a view to taking over the
teaching of students preparing to do literacy among non-literate people groups around the
world. I was able to study and earn graduate credit for the three literacy courses offered
in the linguistic degree program. Working with the professor as a TA also helped solidify
some of the concepts in literacy which were new to me.

It was in this context that the concept of oral culture became clear for the first
time. I had heard the term but did not understand the full implications of what had been
written about this very important reality. After writing a major paper on this topic for one
of my classes, I began to understand what had eluded us in our search for understanding
of the response of the Folopa people to literacy instruction. Knowing about the
characteristics and expectations of oral learners would have made a huge difference in the way in which my husband and I had carried out our work with the Folopa people.

In 2009 my husband and I retired from Wycliffe/SIL and moved to Spokane. I was asked to begin teaching at Moody Bible Institute Spokane in the Fall of that year, concentrating on courses under the Intercultural Studies major. This included Introduction to Language, Second Language Acquisition, and a research class with an emphasis on ethnography. Other classes were Missionary Relationships and Christian Missions.

I also taught for two school years at Spokane Community College in a course designed for non-native, English-speaking students called Voice Articulation. In that course, detailed instruction for pronouncing the sounds of English using the International Phonetic Alphabet was taught. During that time, I had a closer look at immigrants and refugees coming to the United States who were trying to learn English and go on with their education. Hearing their stories was very instructive for me as a teacher. All of these students had been educated to some degree in their home countries. Consequently, issues of orality did not come up. It could be that those who came to this country without prior education did not make it to the community college level.

To summarize the learning from my cross-cultural experience, I can clearly see that the study of orality is important when comparing cultures, and perhaps vital when addressing the needs of student language learners.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Pulling a stiff, bark-cloth cape over his head, the young man shifts uncomfortably between the tangle of enormous roots under the canopy of the jungle beare (pronounced ‘bay ah day’) tree (Figure 1). He is a member of the group of people who speak the Folopa language and who live in a remote rain forest in Papua New Guinea.

Figure 1. The beare tree, commonly known as Strangler Fig (Photo: Anderson archives)

As he settles down for a night at the base of the vine-covered tree, he anticipates having a magical dream that will enable him to become a skilled hunter of jungle animals. Despite the fact that he has hunted alongside his clansmen since the early days of his youth, he believes it will be the dream that will set him apart as one who is “gifted” in the skill of hunting.
In this way, the Folopa-speaking people believed a man would receive from the spirit world a needed ability for a specific task such as hunting. If, in the dream, a very large, flightless bird appears, his specialty would be hunting toli, or the jungle bird known as a cassowary. Dreams, magic rituals, combined with powerful spoken words of an important person were, and still are in many places in the world, believed to be the source of learning, wisdom, and power.

In this chapter, I will introduce the Folopa-speaking people of Papua New Guinea as an example of an isolated group of people gradually entering into the larger world through literacy.

**Living with the Folopa**

My adventure, and first career—which lasted over 34 years—with the Folopa speaking people began in April 1973. Together with my husband and two small children, I took up part-time residence in the small village of Fukutao in the Southern Highlands Province, near the border of the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea (locally abbreviated as PNG). New Guinea, just north of Australia, is the second largest island in the world and is divided down the middle between two countries: Papua, on the west side of the island, is a province of Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea, on the east side of the island, is an independent British Commonwealth country.
Figure 2. Map of Papua New Guinea showing the area occupied by Folopa speakers marked with a black circle.

(Photo: Google Images)

Since achieving independence from Australia in 1975, there has been significant development of natural resources and growth in education and business. Parts of the country that are accessible by roads and airstrips have enjoyed much of the benefits of that development. Where no roads or airstrips are possible to construct due to the mountainous terrain, people still live in relatively untouched conditions.

The Folopa language speakers occupy one of these difficult areas. Theirs is a 1000-square-mile area of rain forest that was accessible only by foot or helicopter in 1973.
As members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) — a translation organization with some 6,000 members serving in every corner of the world — our goal was to be assigned to one of the more than 800 languages in the country (The World Factbook, 2017). We were to learn that language without the aid of classes or language materials, analyze the grammar, create an alphabet and a literacy program where none had existed, translate easy-to-read materials, and eventually translate more difficult reading material such as the New Testament of the Christian Holy Bible.

Our preparation for this undertaking included two semesters at the University of Washington studying applied linguistics and anthropology, as well as five months of “Jungle Camp” training in a remote area of southern Mexico. During the following years, we would receive additional field training in language learning, literacy, and translation.
After arriving in PNG, we were given the opportunity to choose one of several language groups with whom we would be spending the next 15 to 20 (an early estimate) years of our translation career. We chose to work with the Folopa-speaking people because they were very isolated and appeared to have few outside resources. Survey work by SIL had recently been completed and it was determined that no government services were available to them anywhere in the whole of the 1000 square miles of their rain-forest territory.

![Map of Papua New Guinea](image)

*Figure 4.* Part of a language map for the Gulf Province of PNG showing the Folopa language as number 434 out of the 839 identified languages. (Photo: SIL International)

This included education, medical, and legal services. Neighboring languages, shown in figure 4 above, occupied land that was easier to navigate and therefore, had access to more services, particularly education through national schools.

By chance, we met a Folopa speaker named Mose (pronounced *MOE seh*) in the capitol city, Port Moresby, and told him of our hope to work in his language area. He was very excited and agreed to teach us some of the language while we were there in the city.
As it turned out, we later moved into a village just north of his village of Sopese where we would live for six months out of each year as we progressed with our language project.

When we did finally arrive in the village to begin our language study, I spoke to the people in the language I had learned from Mose and was immediately scolded. “We don’t talk like that. That is Sopese (SO peh say) talk,” they said. I learned quickly that there was a strong competition between villages. For generations, they had practiced revenge killing and cannibalism resulting in bitterness and distrust. Though they still exchanged women in marriage, there was little else to bring them together except the occasional obligatory feast to exchange gifts of meat. This was a part of the marriage customs that assured the safety of those in-law relationships.

Dialect differences developed despite the villages only being a few miles apart. In fact, the twelve main villages all spoke a slightly different dialect with the northernmost village unable to understand the language of the southernmost village.

*Figure 5. Folopa men dressed for a feast. (Photo: Anderson archives)*
The Folopa people remained isolated from the national culture well into the 1970s. Even so, there was a small group of villagers there who had been introduced to Christian beliefs by a native evangelist in about 1968. He had since left to continue his work in other villages. Led by a pastor from the language group to the west (see Figure 4 above to view the language boundaries), a loosely-organized church, supported by an organization named The Evangelical Church of Papua (ECP), survived.

Later, when we knew enough language to hear the story, a prominent village leader called Awiane Ali (this name means father of Awiane) told us that the church members in the village had prayed for several years for a missionary to come to help them. As he explained to us how the people viewed our arrival in their village, he spoke of their custom of leading domestic pigs from the bush into the village for bride price exchanges or to be cooked for a feast. A handmade rope called harika (hah di ga) was tied to the pig’s front leg and the animal was pulled along until it reached the owner’s house. Using the term for this rope, Awiane Ali said, “You did not come here by yourself. We prayed that a senaai whi (literally ‘a red man’) would come. God put his harika on your leg and pulled until you came.”

Thankfully, we were not there to be eaten in a feast, as we might have been in earlier days, but we were invited to come to help the church understand more about the Christian faith.
Even with all our training, encountering the realities of an isolated group of jungle dwellers provided shock after shock to our Western way of thinking. The Folopa people had never seen a book or even imagined that their language could be written down and read by anyone who had the skill of reading. Only a handful of people had left the village and managed to attend a school outside the language area. In 1973, none of those had
returned to live in the village. No one spoke the trade language, Melanesian Pidgin, except the church pastor whose own first language was not Folopa. We had to learn the language almost completely by figuring out the meaning of words and the grammar from monolingual interactions with the villagers.

Though we had also prepared for this monumental task by reading and studying about culture—animistic societies in particular, living in a village in Papua New Guinea was still a challenge. Understanding the reasoning of people who relied heavily on sorcery, magic, and beliefs in the presence of ancestral spirits was foreign ground. The Folopa people lacked any kind of modern development in their lifestyle. Their culture and language were encoded with symbolism for the concepts that were most important to them, and as complex as any on earth.

**Oral culture**

In his book, *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter Ong examines the differences “in mentality” between *oral* cultures and those that were originally *oral* and became literate over time (p. 3). Ong allows for cultures having degrees of literateness thus suggesting a continuum. Those that are “totally unfamiliar with writing,” he refers to as being in a state of *primary orality* (p. 6). The only knowledge that exists is that which the living members remember. With no body of literature such as records of events, diaries chronicling the past, or myths and legends, all information had to be memorized or it was lost for all time. At the other end of the continuum are literate cultures that have become dependent on the level of communication that literature, via modern technology, provides.
In some oral cultures of the world, people passed on information via the memorization of vast amounts of history and genealogy (Ong, 1982). The Folopa were not among those who memorized much from their past. Only myths and legends were passed on from one generation to the next, and the details of those were often modified over time.

Stories of their practice of cannibalism—outlawed before our arrival—were still current and told with gory details. Men who broke the rules banning murder that had been laid down by the government experienced the horrors of prison (they called it *di biti be*, literally “dung living-in house”) and returned with their own impressions of the outside world. Other men left the area to find jobs in distant towns and earn money to take back to their families. It was not long before their fear of jail and their lack of education and knowledge of the national culture put them in a position of great disadvantage. Their ability to work hard and live in less-than-modern conditions provided the only advantage in the job market.

**Language learning**

The plot of ground we were given on which to build a house was located right on the main thoroughfare. Since the village was located on a long narrow ridge, (see Figure 7 below) everyone had to walk directly past our house to go anywhere. This meant we were constantly hearing the language spoken, and it also meant we were the center of attention for quite a long time.
We literally began by pointing to things and writing down words. Before we could put a sentence together, months of observing, writing, and practicing were necessary. Communication was facilitated by a church pastor who spoke Melanesian Pidgin, which we spoke as well. For our most pressing concerns, he translated for us. However, for all other needs, we were forced to learn the language through verbal communication using only Folopa.

Listening to the pastor translate for us, I remember well my observation. He ended each sentence with the words *dapo dapo*. I didn’t hear anyone else use those words at the end of a sentence and I wondered if he had made a mistake. Later I would learn that all present tense verbs at the end of a sentence end with some form of *dapo*. The second
*dap*o meant ‘he said’ as a quote marker. As the pastor was quoting either my husband or myself, he added ‘he/she said’ at the end of the sentence.

The most productive method for learning the language turned out to be having various speakers tell a hunting story while being recorded. Noting the grammatical structure as well as vocabulary, the story was painstakingly transcribed and taken apart piece by piece until the mystery words came to light.

**The literacy program**

After months of collecting carefully transcribed words using symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), I began the process of analyzing the sound system. My training had involved courses in phonetics and provided a means to listen to sounds and record them. The study of phonology equipped me to analyze the system and determine which sounds were significant and would form the new alphabet.

It was at this point that I proceeded to create a literacy primer. By means of this first book, we could test the newly-designed alphabet. The first people who learned to read would provide the feedback on the accuracy of our analysis. Through this process, I would eventually learn that we had missed some of the subtle sounds due to our hearing them with “English” ears.

**Faulty assumptions**

I also made assumptions with my “literate” brain about how the program would be done and how it would succeed. Most of these assumptions proved to be unrealistic because, at that point, I did not know much about the oral nature of non-literate cultures. I could only learn this with insight gained from experience.

My assumptions were:
(1) Once a person had been through a course in literacy, he/she would know how to read.

(2) Knowing how to read meant understanding what was read.

(3) Once a person knew how to read, he/she would find it so enjoyable that motivation for continued reading would be automatic.

(4) Once a person saw that knowledge could be gained from reading, he/she would value reading as a source of information about the outside world.

(5) Once literature was valued, he/she would look to further education as a means to learn about the world.

(5b) Lives would be changed! A new world of education would open to these poor people!

Meanwhile, back in the land of reality, Folopas were asking when we would begin to teach them to read and when we would give them a book in their language. I took this as a confirmation of my assumptions. However, none of us understood the complexities of the process that we were about to undertake. Two different imagined worlds of literacy were present: mine was a simple, idealistic view of a Western model of education, and theirs was the receiving of some magical and powerful gift that would open to them the advantages of the senaai whi ‘red man’. This was the Folopa name for normally-white-skinned people, specifically, government patrol officers who arrived after a long and arduous hike into the village, red-faced from sunburn and exhaustion.

The day did finally come when a completed primer was put together and ready to test. Other experienced people in our organization had warned us that literacy in PNG
was very difficult because there was little motivation to learn to read. With the Folopa village people, we saw just the opposite. Everyone wanted to learn.

A tightly-packed crowd of anxious, male faces met us when it came time to choose who would attend the first literacy class. According to the guidelines from our organization, only 25 copies should be produced, and the first class was more for testing the primer, to see if revisions would be necessary, than creating literate villagers.

A noisy argument broke out as the villagers tried to decide who among the one-hundred men would be in that privileged group of 25. The decisions were up to them. First and foremost, they decided that only men would qualify. Secondly, the *seke whirape*, or “big men” of the village—those who were the strongest and most powerful leaders—had priority. These tended to be ages 35 to 40 (our best guess based on their appearance). When the bravest among them had been chosen, the remaining spots went to younger men, who ranged from 20 to 30 years old. Pencils and workbooks were distributed along with the coveted, red-covered primer (the favorite color of the villagers).
Figure 8. The first Folopa primer produced before the invention of personal computers and printers. (Anderson, 1975)

The new students began to assemble at about five o’clock the next morning right outside our bedroom window, making just enough noise to wake us up and remind us that they were anxious to begin. They had heard rumors about this thing called school and its accompanying status to those who would receive a certificate of completion. At the end of the first lesson, there were many complaints about the class not lasting all day like
schools outside the village.

*Figure 9. My husband, Neil, teaching the first class. (Photo: Anderson archives)*

It was not appropriate at that time for a woman to teach the men literacy. It was another two years before women were even allowed to attend classes. My husband taught the daily lessons that had been designed to introduce one new sound with its symbol each day. The first day was the exception, as there had to be enough sounds to make some sensible words.

The format for the lesson was based on a template representing the Gudschinsky method of literacy instruction that was popular at that time (Gudschinsky, 1973). Sarah Gudschinsky was a linguist with SIL during the 1960 and 1970s and had specialized in literacy to non-literate people for decades. Her method focused on introducing one letter
of the alphabet at a time. Each lesson used only the letters that had been taught up to that point in a simple text.

Figure 10. The first page of the new primer. (Anderson, 1975)

The structure of the Folopa language is referred to as an SOV language. This means that the subject is always first, the object is second and the verb is last in a clause or sentence. In the lesson above, two short sentences exemplify the symbols to be
learned. A translation of the lesson is: “This is a yam. This is a bow.” The featured words are *dika* ‘yam’ and *diki* ‘bow’. The symbol ̩ represents the sound ə (open back rounded vowel) in IPA.

\[
\text{Ita dikapó.} \quad \text{Ita dikipó.}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I} & \quad \text{ta diká-pó} \\
\text{this-(specific) yam} & \quad \text{is}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I} & \quad \text{ta díki-pó} \\
\text{this-(specific) bow} & \quad \text{is}
\end{align*}
\]

From this example, the basic structure can be seen. Initial subject or secondary object take the same suffixes and mark plural, accompaniment, topic and specific indications, as well as morphemes to indicate English equivalent words ‘only’, ‘also’, ‘as well’, and more. Folopa does not have prepositions, but instead has post position suffixes indicating direction and location.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{be-mó} & \quad \text{be-paae} \\
\text{‘house - at} & \quad \text{house - toward}
\end{align*}
\]

Verb morphology follows the pattern below.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{verb stem} & \quad \text{+ tense/aspect} & \quad \text{+ mood} \\
\text{teke} & \quad \text{ta} & \quad \text{pó}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{cut} & \quad \text{(present)} & \quad \text{(indicative)}
\end{align*}
\]

To say ‘I cut firewood’ instead of the above example, the sentence would be:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{E} & \quad \text{si} & \quad \text{teke-ta-pó} \\
\text{I} & \quad \text{firewood} & \quad \text{cut - PresTense IND}
\end{align*}
\]

There are no articles equivalent to English ‘the’ and ‘a’. Other tenses are shown below.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tek-alo-pó} & \quad \text{‘will cut’} & \quad \text{tek-ale-pó} & \quad \text{‘cut (past)} & \quad \text{teke-lipakale-pó} & \quad \text{‘cut (far past)}
\end{align*}
\]
For a more in depth look at the Folopa language, see Appendices A and B.

Each day the students sat expectantly waiting for the magic of literacy, the knowledge of reading, and the skill of writing to arrive in the classroom. For the youngest of the students, the new skills developed quickly.

After the first lesson, a young man named Wheare, having discerned the pattern for the rest of the lessons, stood outside my kitchen door and asked me to pronounce the sound of each of the remaining symbols. Once he had absorbed the information, he left. Within days he had learned the whole primer and was reading the short stories that accompanied each lesson.
Seeing how easily some were learning was encouraging to us, but became discouraging to the older students. Three good readers emerged from that first class, as well as a few who learned the concepts but read very haltingly. All the older men failed to learn. It was here that we, as well as the villagers, observed a new reality; the position of seke whi, or “big man”—the one who had killed the most enemies in the past, married and produced at least five children—had lost some of its significance. The young men now had the new power and had shamed the older ones to some degree by outshining them with their new skills.

The older men quietly went back to their ordinary activities, acting as if nothing had changed. One of these was an exception. His name was Sotereape. Local custom did not allow married people to be called by their given names, so they would be called someone’s husband or wife, or someone’s father or mother. Sotereape was called Awiam Ali (Awiam’s father as mentioned above). His motivation proved to be more than curiosity; he wanted to be able to read the scriptures that were being translated. After the class ended, he spent hours going over the lessons again and again. I asked him if he could read yet and he said no. It seemed as if he would never gain the skill he so fervently longed for.

**A new learning model**

SIL required its members to take a one-year leave after four years on a foreign field. We were about to leave when Awiam Ali asked for a copy of the trial edition of Genesis, our first translated book of the Christian Bible. We gave him a bright-red, newly-printed copy.
One year later in 1977, we returned to the village. In the first few days, we were busy getting organized to get back to work on language learning and translation. The building where my husband and interested villagers spent hour upon hour discussing the ideas to be translated was called the *baibel be, or* “Bible house.” The best method was to meet around the large, circular table with a team of people who carefully listened to our attempts to explain the meaning of the material to be translated. Then, it was up to us to listen to them as to how to best express these thoughts in natural, grammatical Folopa language.

There was less than 150 square feet to squeeze in ten men around the table, along with another ten or so women and small children sitting on the floor. We had a policy of allowing anyone to attend who was interested.

![Figure 12. Village men sitting at the round translation table (Photo: Anderson archives)](image)

I was preparing a meal in my kitchen and listening to the chatter of people sitting on the front porch a few feet away. I heard a different sound. It was not the sound of normal conversation. It was too measured and monotone. Someone was reading aloud. I went out on the porch and there sat Awiamel Ali with his brown, well-worn copy of
Genesis reading for all the world to hear. I called my husband and we both stood there amazed.

“How did you learn to read?” we asked. He explained that he had sat with others for hours as they read aloud, trying to follow in his text and listening closely. Still the actual skill of reading alluded him. Finally, in desperation, he decided to do something more in line with his culture. Sleeping under the beare tree would be the normal Folopa way to induce an appropriate dream and gain the needed skill. But this didn’t seem right because the skill he needed was not a normal jungle skill. So, in our absence, he had let himself into the Bible House and slept under the table that the men sat around when working on the Folopa language.

Figure 13. Awiame Ali reading aloud as he sat on the front porch. (Photo: SIL International)
Our reaction initially was surprise and amusement. People don’t really learn by sleeping under a table, do they? In reality, it was a huge lesson in Folopa culture. This oral culture had its own model for education that did not include any of the activities we normally associate with learning. This older man sincerely believed that the new ability was attributed to his night’s sleep under the *senaai whi* equivalence to a *beate* tree.

![Figure 14. Awiane Ali trying to read with Hweare (Photo: SIL International)](image)

The modeling of behaviors and hours of practice to learn the new skill had not been viewed as the major factor in success. And so it was with parents who did not intentionally demonstrate skills for their children. The children were on their own and had to pick up needed skills from copying the behaviors of older villagers. When asked
about how a villager learned a specific skill, the reply was usually in the context of magic or spiritual power.

Having a skill is associated with having power over others. Therefore, we observed that a clansman would help his “brother” (meaning any male relative) to learn how to read, but would not do this for someone of another clan. And no one would teach a female to read. They were the last people with whom men wanted to share power. However, a notable exception was Awiame Ali. He taught his daughter to read and she, of course, wasted no time in passing on the skill to other women regardless of clan affiliation. Fortunately, the idea of sleeping under the table did not catch on, and students from then on stuck to more conventional (by our standards) methods.

![Figure 15. Awiame teaching another woman to read. (Photo: Anderson archives)](image)

Awiame and Deke Hama (see figure 15 above) sat on the front porch and read aloud. I said to a man who stood nearby, “Those women are reading.” He replied, “No.
They are not reading. They are pretending to read. Women are dumb and they cannot learn to read.” He looked at me as if I was one of the dumb women who needed to be informed about something obvious. “Women make gardens and raise pigs. They cannot learn to read.” The two heard the comments and stepped up the volume of their recitation.

When the skill of reading became a common practice, the thought that it was magical faded away. It did not seem at first to give any extra power to an individual, so its value soon diminished. Though reading no longer held the magical aura everyone had expected, writing was a different story.

During writing workshops, everyone had a story they wanted to tell. Most of these concerned hunting animals or getting injured while hunting animals. Those who were learning to write were to compose a story and write it out to be reproduced for a booklet we would hand out to anyone who wanted one.
I decided to give them art lessons when I saw the pictures of animals they drew from their stories. Their drawings looked like something out of cave paintings from thousands of years ago. I drew a picture of the same animals and held mine beside theirs. “Which one looks most like the real animal?” I asked proudly, knowing that my drawing was much more realistic. They chose their own drawing over mine every time. In fact, when they looked at my drawing they were not even sure what it was I was trying to draw. At that point, they had a concept of art that was different than mine. Later, through
additional exposure to Western art and photographs, they learned to identify more items in the pictures.

Figure 17. Folopa men writing their hunting stories (Photo: Anderson archives)

Another reason for the popularity of writing became communication between villagers and their relatives who were away working in various town locations in the country. When a man headed out of the village, walking to the nearest road and hopefully finding some means of transportation, he carried letters from family members. Returnees brought back greetings and assurances of well-being from the Folopa men who had found labor jobs outside the area.

Letters became a means of communicating difficult requests. It was not culturally appropriate to ask someone, including me, for a favor. A letter became the means of reminding me of a favor I had received and what a great thing it would be if I paid back the favor with a new bush knife or an axe, or any number of items not found in the
village. I was tempted to tell them that this kind of behavior was not acceptable in my culture, but I decided not to do that. This was an application of literacy that was motivating them to learn the skills of writing, even if it made me feel uncomfortable. Contrary to the notions of liberal Western thinkers, the Christian missionary’s job is not to try to change the culture of native people groups. Ideas are presented, but there is no coercion or punishment for those who reject their teaching.

Assumptions

Listed above are the assumptions I made as I began the literacy program with the Folopa people. Those assumptions changed once I saw the effects that exposure to literacy had on the culture after several years.

1. A culture that is primarily oral may have an approach to education and learning that contrasts greatly with a highly literate culture.

2. Introducing literacy to a person from an oral culture requires an increased understanding of the point at which the learner is beginning. This includes understanding the characteristics of oral culture.

3. Oral learners have no metalinguistic skills. In other words, they are not able to view language analytically, viewing words as units that can be labeled and understood as being part of a grammar.

4. Strong motivation and willingness to persevere are keys to learning new skills, particularly for older people.

5. If the new skill does not produce the expected benefits, motivation will die.

6. Some rewards and benefits must accompany learning new skills in order for motivation to continue.
(7) Becoming literate in a person’s first language (L1) is much easier than learning to read and write for the first time in a second (L2) language.

**Rationale**

In my 34 years of work among the Folopa people, I developed a sense of the unique characteristics of an oral culture. With each passing year, it was more and more obvious the enormous difference in my understanding of the world and theirs. I realized that my perspective had been radically conditioned by my advanced literate state and the Folopa perspective was a product of their limited view of the world. They have a far superior knowledge of their jungle environment and the complex relationships they share with each other than I could ever hope to grasp. But when I looked deeply into the linguistic forms of their language and saw reflections of their worldview, they could not appreciate my insights, for they did not see their language as an object to analyze.

When I began to understand more about the phenomenon of oral culture, I was amazed to find that I had been seeing the signs of it all along. Many of the difficulties I encountered and problems I could not solve then were due to the powerful influence of their oral culture.

After all these years, it is my desire to pass along to others the observations and insights about oral culture that I gained by living with the Folopa people.

**Purpose**

The issues that are the focus of this thesis are as follows:

1. The oral culture of the Folopa speaking people as representing oral cultures from undeveloped areas of the world.
(2) My own experience of becoming literate through the culture of the educational system of the US.

(3) How the Western system approaches people from oral cultures and suggestions on how it can be improved

**Research questions**

1. How do the cultural values of the Folopa people give insight into teaching non-literate ESL learners?
2. How does my own experience of becoming literate give insight into the values of Western education?
3. How can these contrasting experiences with oral and literate culture provide insight for future teaching of literacy to ESL students?

**Methodology**

This thesis is primarily a qualitative study that is written from a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology is the study of a phenomenon which, in this case, is language expressed in two realities: oral and literate. They are not mutually exclusive but they do show up in people, each having a different “consciousness” (Ong, 1973). Fetterman (2010) describes the phenomenological approach as embracing, a multicultural perspective because it accepts multiple realities. People act on their individual perceptions, and those actions have real consequences—thus the subjective reality each individual sees is no less real than an objectively defined and measured reality (p. 5).
The methodology I am employing is ethnography, in that I am describing culture, and contrasting the Folopa culture with my own. It is also autoethnographic, in that I am describing my personal experience being in a culture and the applications I have taken away from my observations of the two cultures. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) describe autoethnography as:

an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (ELLIS, 2004; HOLMAN JONES, 2005)…A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product (p. 2).

In defense of autoethnography as a research method, they write that it, “expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research.” Many of the events and observations I use are described more fully in a book I wrote and published in 1998 (Anderson, 1998). Other accounts are taken from Anderson and Moore (1999).

I have taken the story of my past experience, examined the current literature to further elucidate my own observations, and drawn conclusions that may help teachers of preliterate people from oral cultures to more effectively help their students.

**Overview**

Chapter 2 presents a review of research written by people who have worked with ESL learners who, for various reasons, had little or no exposure to reading and writing prior to coming to the United States or Canada. Chapter 3 includes a description of my own experience of becoming literate in the United States. In Chapter 4 I describe my
experience in an oral culture as I observed the Folopa people in their various life events, and thus draw conclusions about contrasting values. In Chapter 5, I compare the *oral* state versus the *literate* state in areas such as education, information, and relationships. The assumptions and research questions from Chapter 1 are reviewed along with comments on learning from this study. Chapter 6 is a conclusion that includes possible applications for teachers who may teach oral culture students and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2

Orality and immigration

In this chapter, a review of the literature about English language education for immigrant and refugee populations is presented. The focus of this review is language and literacy learners who have come from a background of no, or minimal, formal education.

Among the thousands of immigrants and refugees who arrive in the United States and Canada each year, there is a significant percentage of older children and adults who have very little or no formal education, and many do not speak English. Haverson and Haynes (1982) first identified three categories of low-education ESL learners. They are (quoted from Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010):

*Pre-literate.* Learners from a culture and language without print literacy, or in which language is just beginning to be written and is not widely available, so they are not print-literate in any language (e.g., some Hmong refugees)

*Nonliterate.* Learners from a culture and language with print literacy but who have not yet become print-literate (e.g., some Haitian migrant workers)

*Semi-literate.* Learners who understand that print carries meaning but are unable to decode or encode print themselves (e.g., a person with interrupted formal schooling who may have begun to acquire print literacy but was not in school long enough to master basic skills). (p. 1)

These terms are used by the literate to describe the relationship of oral culture people to literate people. All the labels assume a deficiency until the oral learner becomes literate. The assumption is that people in a modern Western nation must become literate to survive and participate in the national culture. According to McLuhan, as quoted in Carr
(2011), the “Gutenberg technology”, or print literacy, was at the heart of the formation of the American way of life. (p. 2) The implication in using these terms is that literacy is one of the essentials of life in the Western world. Every term is oriented to the need for literacy. Other than the terms oral, orality, and oral culture, there seems to be no other options for referring to the people groups that do not rely on literacy. This presents a challenge to the non-literate newcomer who must acculturate to the values in North America and the rest of the Western world.

**The difficulties low-education immigrants face**

Once low-education refugees and immigrants arrive in their new country, one of the most significant obstacles is lack of ESL classes that cater to their special educational needs (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Johnson & Owen, 2013; Biazar & Pashang, 2016). Even a small amount of prior literacy training is helpful to make the transfer to English literacy (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Goswami, 2004). Without the skills to view language as an object to be analyzed and decoded, they struggle in ESL classes that assume knowledge of these important concepts (Huang & Newbern, 2012; Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Dooley, 2009). They lack phonological awareness (Goswami, 2004; Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010) which is the ability to view written symbols as representing sounds. They lack the physical, fine motor tuning of hand muscles for writing (Dooley, 2009) and the vision training to differentiate between small symbols on a page (Vinogradav & Bigalow, 2010). Pictures and illustrations are foreign and represent things with which they are not familiar (Bialystok, 2017; Knowland & Thomas, 2014; Lee, 2016).
Intimidation and fear often results from being in a class with other students who are way ahead in these skills (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Johnson & Owen, 2013). The dropout rate is very high for students who do manage to find a class they can join. Teachers have so many students to attend to that most often the low education students’ need for personal attention and evaluation goes unmet (Hebanni, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2012).

Bojennson (2015) reports that 65% of Syrian refugees are functionally illiterate. They have little or no formal education, but all are required to join the workforce and become self-sufficient. In his or her home country, they may have been thought to be brilliant with the ability to speak eloquently and have long passages of their religious material memorized. Values differ in the Western world. As Edward Hall (1989) observes about the value of memory, “Iranian educators do not care how students store and retrieve information just as long as they remember.”

In a very thorough investigation of the published research on what they label “low-education”, or non-literate adult refugees, Bigalow and Schwarz (2010) cite the main reasons for refugee non-literacy rates as poverty, political, natural disasters, gender, and cultural expectations (Batalova, Mittelstadt, Mather, & Lee, 2008). In the original home countries, many have had no opportunity to attend school, as their labor was needed to help the family survive poverty. Some populations are in a social class that is prevented from seeking education, such as the Dalits of India. Individuals are required to take the low-level jobs that others do not want. Deprived of everything they had owned, a great many refugees arrive having experienced earthquakes and civil wars. Refugee
camps may have provided some educational opportunities, but for the most part, very little may have been learned.

**Orality**

Olson and Torrance (1991) brought together a number of theorists to respond to Walter Ong’s volume titled *Orality and Literacy* (1982). Olson and Torrance’s book is titled *Literacy and Orality* (1991) and is a continuation of the arguments that Ong makes (pp. 5-9) about the contrast in “consciousness” between people who are from primarily non-literate, or oral, cultures versus those who are from literate cultures. The main proponents of the “different consciousness” or “different mentality” argument; Havelock, Denny, Illich, Kittay, and Olson, write at length about phonological and syntactical awareness and the ability to objectify language. The authors realize that there is something very different about the way people think and process information depending on the degree of exposure to and dependence on literacy.

What was begun as an argument for “consciousness”, modern science continues with detailed explanations about current discoveries in brain structure and development. Bigalow and Schwarz (2010) (see also, Goswami, 2009; Knowland & Thomas, 2014) summarize, and more aptly explain, how experiments with fMRI testing has shown the brain structures of literate and non-literate people to be physically different. The skills taught in the process of becoming literate develop parts of the brain that are not well developed in non-literate people. Likewise, non-literate people often have better developed areas of their brains that literate people have not developed. An example of this is focus. Literate people know where to focus on a page and how to interpret illustrations. Non-literate people have learned to focus on places that are meaningful to
their lifestyle and have difficulty focusing on words and letters. As a result, non-literate people must develop the very basic skills involved in recognition, focusing and decoding symbols on a written surface, and many more important skills that literate people take for granted (Vinogradav & Bigalow, 2010).

Non-literate students in a class mixed with others who have previously learned literacy skills usually results in a very poor learning environment. Embarrassment and feelings of failure result making it very difficult to keep the low education student coming to an ESL class. Older students struggle even more because their natural rate of learning is often slower than their younger counterparts. Many have children who have already passed them up in language learning and literacy (Dooley, 2009; Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Johnson & Owen, 2013).

Duckworth (2016), in her book, *Grit*, about what makes people persist and succeed, cites the Flynn Effect (Dickens & Flynn, 2001) as an explanation in part for another major factor that separates uneducated immigrants, coming from countries where they had no access to education or technology, from those who grew up with television, computers, and classrooms that stress analytical problem solving. The Flynn Effect refers to “startling gains in IQ scores over the past century” that Flynn found when comparing the abilities of people from a century ago with what people are able to do now. When a closer look is taken at what was actually measured in the IQ assessments, analytical reasoning and problem solving come to the surface. Crediting television and other media sources, Flynn describes the improvement of various skills as vicarious—a result of observing others perform. The classroom is also a social environment that provides students what Flynn calls the “social multiplier effect.” Students learn from and
are motivated by each other. Even for many who have attended school in a non-Western setting, skills, such as discussing meaning and asking questions that form the center of the culture of the classroom, are unknown. Early tests for intelligence were shown to have a cultural bias and tend to favor the highly literate (Reynolds & Suzuki, 2013).

Immigrant students without formal education in their home countries learned important skills that were suited to that environment. For many, the skills were not the analytical skills required to move forward quickly in English language literacy. The context for the learning environment in an American school is culturally determined and will remain foreign until a grasp of the new culture is learned. (pp. 83-84)

**Brain science**

Bialystok’s (2017) research on brain adaptation offers hope for the non-literate student of English literacy, explaining the physical science behind the contrast between the literate and non-literate brain structures. The current science sheds new light on the different “mentality” or “consciousness” that Ong wrote about before the advent of fMRI research. Brains are designed to change over time with the right experience and learning environment. With time, understanding, and patience, non-literate students can develop the needed skills (Knowland & Thomas, 2014).

One hopeful strategy for making the transition is to have the initial teaching of literacy in the person’s own language (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Vinogradav & Bigalow, 2010). A limited amount of quantitative research on this topic has been done to date. What has been researched shows that learning to read in one’s own language is much easier (Knowland & Thomas, 2014) and starts the process of developing the necessary brain functions, and thus the skills necessary for a good transfer to a second
language. Even the smallest amount of training before attempting English literacy is helpful, as one of the main barriers to overcome is the metalinguistic, or analytic, one (Chyl et al., 2018). Olson writes about what he calls the hypothesis: “making language into an object of thought and discourse” (Olson, 1991), which is a concept that oral cultures do not understand in the same way as a literate culture. Once a student realizes that symbols represent sounds and words are meant to be understood as messages that can be comprehended and acted upon, the rest of the challenge is just a matter of time (Dooley, 2009; Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010).

Bigalow and Schwarz (2010) review the research that has been done on teaching strategies for this very underserved immigrant group. Because so little has been done in this area, the authors note the lack of documented evidence. What has been written is often anecdotal and of a qualitative nature. Perry (2012) cites a case study of a teacher who was very successful in working with the low-education group. The strongest recommendations coming from that study are for teachers to have increased training in cultural sensitivity and knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds (see also, Johnson & Owen, 2013). Many ESL teachers are merely volunteers who mean well but have little training (Perry, 2013).

Bernsdorf (2009) presents a case for using music as a means to break down barriers and increase skills in phonological awareness. Singing and dancing powerfully effect people’s moods and willingness to utter words that they would not ordinarily feel free to express. In addition, Bernsdorf refers to Kraus, Skoe, Parbery-Clark, and Ashley (2009) who posited that music training develops the structure of the brain, as mentioned above by Bialystok. Bernsdorf summarizes the findings of Kraus et al:
Musical experience has a pervasive effect on the nervous system. Our recent articles show that lifelong musical experience enhances neural encoding of speech as well as music and heightens audiovisual interaction. Our work suggests that musicians have a specialized neural system for processing sight and sound in the brain stem, the neural gateway to the brain (Kraus et al, 2009, p. 17).

Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) recommend incorporating rap music in a class for African students as a means of encouraging them to identify with their own culture and find a welcoming environment. Use of this medium also can be a springboard to metalinguistic awareness.

Knowland and Thomas (2014) recommend seven important environmental factors which make the brain more likely to learn. They are 1) a great deal of practice; 2) having good motivation; 3) having a live tutor as opposed to just a book or recording; 4) a noise and distraction-free place to learn; 5) materials that are exaggerated to show contrast between distinctions in words and information; 6) a logical order to introduce new materials; and 7) having adequate sleep so that the brain can process the language well.

Following the above recommendations is simple but not effortless for most people. The first point concerning the amount of practice that is necessary to accomplish a goal is addressed by Duckworth (2016). She makes the distinction between randomly repeating an activity and doing “deliberate practice.” Deliberate practice is achieved when a learner has:

- A clearly defined stretch goal
- Full concentration and effort
- Immediate and informative feedback
Repetition with reflection and refinement (p. 137)

Duckworth writes that “mindlessly going through the motions without improvement—can be its own form of suffering.” (p. 135) It is possible that much of the difficulty teachers find with low-literacy students can be traced to a poor concept of what constitutes effective and deliberate practice.

Bonnie Norton adds an additional dimension to Duckworth in her discussion of investment (Norton, 2013). Language learners will invest time and effort in order to receive a return of, not only material rewards, but also a greater sense of self and new identity. Having that growing sense of identity enhances the determination to keep on in the learning process (p. 50).

Recommendations

Teaching methods and strategies are the focus of much of the literature for ESL learners, in particular, those with low education. Johnson and Owen (2013) quote Gay (2000) in an explanation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). This method emphasizes the need for emotional and caring support for the immigrant learner who may have gone through, and may still be going through, very difficult times. In an attempt to meet the needs, the teacher must learn about each individual student. This means provide a safe environment and, if possible, incorporate the first language of the student (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010). When making a mistake, Duckworth (2016) recommends that teachers model a positive attitude to demonstrate that the class is a safe environment in which a student can make a mistake and happily correct it without embarrassment or shame. Purposely making a mistake in front of students, teachers may show how it can be used to learn instead of finding it a negative experience (p. 142).
Strategies for having students tell their own stories to each other has a healing effect and provides interesting, personal reading material (Geres, 2017). However, caution is raised about allowing all material in the classroom. Bringing sadness and fear into the learning environment, some stories may be too violent and disturbing for other students to hear, (Waterhouse, 2017). Students have been known to express symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder from experiencing violence vicariously.

Hebbani et al., (2012) cites Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions (1980) in consideration of his categories “collective” and “individualistic” as well as the concept of “power distance”. The cultures of immigrant and refugee students are likely to be collective, or ones in which group decision making is the norm and in which relationships are very important. In contrast, the individualism of the English-speaking world stresses individual rights and decision making. Relationships can be overlooked and neglected. “Power distance”, or the relationship to authority, may be very different in the view of the immigrant student. For the immigrant, the role of parent and spouse may be authoritarian and absolute. Punishment meted out by by the head of the household may cross the line of what is legal in the new cultural environment. In contrast to the home country, accepted behavior and values for citizens in the new country may make acculturation difficult and may cause failure to acculturate (Hebbani et al., 2012).

Considering the enormous number of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States and Canada, it is imperative that strategies be created through federal, state, and local governments to have provisions and resources available to meet the needs of these people (Anders & Lester, 2013). Those involved in ESL teaching need to be adequately trained and prepared to understand and serve the needs of possibly
traumatized people who are having great difficulties in resettling in a foreign country and learning a foreign language (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Perry, 2013; Biazar & Pashang, 2016; Hebbani et al., 2012). As a result, failure to meet the needs will contribute to poor acculturation and lead to anger, ill will, and possibly violence from frustrated refugees (Anders & Lester, 2013).

In conclusion, it is well documented that low-education and oral learners need special consideration by adequately trained teachers in a language-learning classroom. That consideration includes a great deal of patience and understanding as the learner tries to overcome the gaps or lack of ability in skills that are required for literacy to be accomplished.
Chapter 3

Becoming literate in America

In this chapter, I look at the events of my early life in order to identify the circumstances that brought me to the place I term as ‘literate’. Ong (1982) writes, “Everyone who can say ‘I’ has an acute sense of self. But reflectiveness and articulateness about the self take time to grow.” He contends that it is the act of writing itself that leads a person to stand objectively outside the self and observe its behaviors (p. 175). Consequently, writing about myself is an act of literacy.

“Nothing would seem more ‘natural’ than talking about oneself,” write Bruner and Weisser (1991). In their essay titled, ‘The invention of self: autobiography and its forms,’ they observe that there are “strong conventions regarding not only what we say when we tell about ourselves, but how we say it, and to whom.” The authors suggest that “in some important sense, ‘lives’ are texts: texts that are subject to revision, exegesis, and reinterpretation.” Each reiteration of the events of a person’s life calls for such revision and reinterpretation based on the focus and cause for the retelling (p. 129). Thus, the very act of telling one’s story is an act born from a literate perspective. Depending on the degree one has compared his or her life with the analysis of others, a person becomes aware of what events are of importance and significance (p. 135-6).

The most basic meaning for the term literate is having the ability to read and write. It may mean much more, such as, having a knowledge of literature or being well-read. It may mean merely having an education, and may even suggest a person’s social status and accomplishments. When the term literate is coupled with the word culture,
Ong describes this specifically as a culture that is “deeply affected by the use of writing,” and implies that the ability to read is an essential part of Western culture (p. 1).

The value of having knowledge and the means of acquiring knowledge are deeply embedded into the part of Western culture that I call my own. Looking back to the 1950’s and 1960’s in my hometown of Spokane, Washington, I remember well how my values concerning literacy developed.

**American literate culture**

I have no memory of conversations in my family, even though there was always a minimum of four other people in the home. Following a very active, extroverted, firstborn child, I was the shy child who stood in my sister’s shadow. I do not remember any discussions about ideas, news reports, or current events. No one talked about their feelings, thoughts, fears, or joys. With little response except for anger at trivial household matters or family squabbles, life just rolled out each day.

Television barely existed when I was young. However, every generation after my youth has been heavily influenced by the availability of televised, pre-school programs that led to the skill of reading and writing (De Carlo & Flokstra, 2017; Kotler, Truglio & Betancourt, 2016) Programs like Sesame Street find very young children listening intently as the concepts of numbering things and sounding out letter symbols are introduced. Coming to life on the screen with amusing and colorful characters, story books are narrated by professional media personalities.

The very fact that most of the programs’ content was, and still is, dedicated to becoming literate speaks volumes. For the young in our society, this is very central and important to the future of each little individual. More than any other skill taught to the
very young in my culture, reading and writing are shown to receive the rewards of affirmation and respect. Early accomplishment in these may even earn labels like prodigy and genius.

For generations, school attendance in the United States has not been an optional activity. An important factor that made this possible was the cost. Because everyone paid taxes, and taxes supported the cost of education, school through high school did not cost much extra expense to a family. It was important enough to warrant laws requiring students to be in school until at least age 16. If I did not show up or if I was late for school, I was in trouble. Not attending school usually resulted in the truant officer becoming involved, and that was a deterrent for most students. Looking down upon such delinquents and trouble-makers, we all knew that the children who skipped school became the rebels of society.

Education was conducted on a fixed and immoveable schedule. Reading, arithmetic, science, social studies, and even recess, was timed to the minute.

One message came through loud and clear; if a student didn’t do well at school, future success was in doubt. A common threat used by teachers—particularly to boys—was, if you don’t finish school, you will wind up being a ditch digger. Having never seen anyone digging a ditch, I was still able to conclude that a person must be stupid to have to do this shameful job. Digging ditches must have been at the very bottom of the social and career ladder.

If a career was to be the future option for female students, then teachers encouraged the girls of my generation to become nurses or teachers. If a student wasn’t quite that smart, she could expect to be a secretary. No teacher ever mentioned the
possibility that I might be a wife and mother some day. That kind of prediction did not produce motivation for effort in spelling and arithmetic. Unfortunately, praise was reserved for those who received better grades and achieved higher levels of education.

Times have changed. In the US, home schooling is now permitted, along with many programs as alternatives to the traditional model. The one thing that has not changed is that some form of schooling is required and students must meet established standards for their education. The performance on a test determines whether the standard has been met. To achieve a greater degree of literacy, higher levels of education were, and are still, required.

**Listening**

Upon request, my mother would provide details of her family history. After extensive questioning over a period of years, I pieced together her story. She was never one to just sit and share family stories unless she could turn it into either a drama or a comedy routine.

I did not realize the implications of her narrative until many years later. Mother was an only child from a troubled home. Leaving school at sixteen, she married young and became a war widow by age nineteen. With only a 10\textsuperscript{th} grade education, she later married my father, a US Air Force Captain stationed in Australia. Near the end of the war, his airplane crash landed. He escaped alive, but 22 men burned to death. With this as their background, both my parents had serious emotional scars from the war which contributed to their alcoholism and eventual divorce.
After coming to the United States, Mother was left with four little children when my father abandoned us. She could work only in menial positions and was unable to afford childcare. Needless to say, our family struggled to survive during those years.

Listening provided one positive memory formed when I was no more than five or six years old. I remember sitting with my three siblings, huddled on the floor. Mother read Oscar Wilde’s “The Happy Prince”, a modern fairy tale he designed to be both humorous and tug at the heartstrings. Despite the fact that I had heard many times, “High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince.” I loved to hear her read, again and again, how the Prince ordered the little swallow to pluck out his gold and jewel decorations and give them to the poor of the city. We cried when the swallow obeyed and then died at the feet of the now ugly statue. Stripped of his gold and jewels, the statue no longer pleased the towns people, and was melted down. Perhaps this was when the values of service and sacrifice were planted in my mind.

Other selections she chose from more adult books; *The Tales of a Sentimental Bloke* by C. J. Dennis (1910), poems written in quaint British dialect which mother could do so well.

Then there was *The Snow Goose* by Paul Gallico, another tear jerker about the sacrifices made at Dunkirk during the war, and topped off with a reading of the 23rd Psalm from the Holy Bible.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Because I was very young, I don’t remember what the readings meant. I remember the emotions that were generated were powerful and had a lasting impact after many other events were forgotten. Consequently, my first experience with listening to literature was
positive. Taking the skill of reading for granted, I assumed that it was part of normal life and something that everyone learned to do.

Later in life, as I read the biographies and autobiographies of accomplished people, I realized that early in life most came from families that discussed issues, challenged ideas, and encouraged reading. Reflecting on my own experience, I appreciate the little exposure that I did have and the significance it had on my becoming literate.

**Metalinguistics and grammar**

Learning to speak a language is not the same as learning about a language. When I learned to speak English, it was completely a process of listening to people talk and imitating them. My brain processed the words and I learned the grammar, not as a set of rules, but automatically. My brain had the capability of sorting out which words go with other words and in what order. Learning all the right sounds and eliminating those that were not required for speech, my brain required no formal analysis of language to learn how to speak.

So it is with everyone who learns their first language. We internalize language in a way that does not require us to articulate the rules of grammar. In first grade, it was only when I began learning to read and write that the rules were presented for me to learn. Learning twenty-six, symbols called the alphabet and the sounds they represent became the first task in becoming literate. Then I had to learn many rules as to why some symbols represented more than one sound and under what conditions they changed. For instance, I learned that the letter *a* makes the sound *ahh*. Then I was shown a picture of an apple. The *a* in the word apple is not pronounced *ahh*. And the letter *o* sometimes
sounds like *ahh*. When a person is six years old, he or she learns to accept these strange realities without question.

As I learned to read individual words and apply the rules to sound out the various combinations of symbols, I came to view English not only as my expression of communication but also as an object that could be studied and analyzed. It was broken down into parts that had names; first they were named letters of the alphabet, then they were called words, and then later given labels like parts of speech, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

What I have described is called metalinguistic awareness. Reder, Marec-Breton, Gomber, and Demont, (2013) refer to Gombert (1992),

Metalinguistic awareness is defined as the speaker’s ability to distance himself from the content of speech in order to pay attention to the structural features of language and to the language’s properties as an object. Then, the speaker can implement a conscious thought and manipulation of the structural features of language also leading him to develop his semantic abilities (p. 686).

This awareness began in the first grade and developed throughout my years in the school system, growing ever more complex in understanding of the structure and use of language. Not all my classmates were equally as astute when it came to identifying the function of the various structures of language, despite the fact that we all had equal opportunity to learn. My strengths in analysis benefitted me. While I loved things like diagramming sentences, those whose gifts were not in analysis struggled trying to understand such activities. This is to say that all those who had the chance to acquire metalinguistic awareness over a period of many years of formal education did not easily
grasp the concepts. Not all types of intelligence lend themselves well to the analysis of language and the discussion of metalinguistic grammatical functions.

Comprehension is an important part of leading students into higher levels of literacy. In one particular English class in high school, I remember the discussions about the characters in the novel *Moby Dick*. Who were they? What were their motivations? How did they add to the plot of the book? It was there that I began to realize that the message of a book went deeper than just being aware of the action in the story.

After completing high school and some college levels of education, I studied graduate courses in linguistics. I worked for thirty-four years in a foreign language applying that linguistic knowledge. Looking at a complex English sentence, determining the function of various words in order to rightly discern how the parts relate to each other is still a challenge. For me, metalinguistic awareness continues to grow as I experience language diversity. It takes effort on my part to put myself in the shoes of someone who has never experienced education as I have known it.

**Reading**

I cannot remember any pre-school activities that I was exposed to, though in modern US culture these types of activities and materials abound. When I did enter the system, school was not difficult and I could finish a day with minimal effort. I remember fondly the tastes and smells of the elementary grades in school: the taste of the white paste we used for crafts (yes, I actually ate it), the smell of duplicator ink on freshly printed worksheets, and the smell of a new box of crayons. These were positive sensations associated with positive results.
In the early grades, the reading books were overly simple and the stories uninteresting. I was part of the “Run, Spot, run.” generation of literacy materials. Later, when Spot actually ran somewhere, it was much more interesting. Because the stories were somewhat irrelevant and bland, reading was only an activity required by the school. The culture of the stories was outside of my experience. Dick and Jane had a happy, intact family that never was evicted from their home because of poverty. Spot never got killed by a car, as all my pet dogs had serially succumbed. The narratives represented a cultural ideal of the model family of the day.

Once reading began to be more interesting, I turned to it as a solitary activity instead of merely reading for school assignments. As a very introverted child, I spent a lot of time “in my head”. A chaotic and stressful home life drove me to find comfort in my calming imagination. Being alone with my thoughts, I escaped into daydreams and books. I loved books about horses or dogs, and I am sure I read every book on these topics that my school library had on its shelves.

School was not difficult for me, but it still held degrees of tension and stress. Worrying about not doing well, what my peers thought of me, what the teachers thought of me; these became the prime sources of motivation. Initially, the notion of learning facts was secondary.

Since my home life was empty in terms of affirmation or support, school became the place I sought to build some kind of identity for myself. Being one of seven children meant little time or attention from my mother. Teachers became the significant adults in my life. If I could do well in school and a teacher approved of me, then maybe I could become a worthy person some day.
A few blocks away from one of my childhood homes, a very small local library served the neighborhood. I remember going there often and finding the children’s books conveniently shelved close to the floor where I could sit and read. One day the librarian suggested that I apply for a library card and take the books home. That had a good side and a bad side. I found lots of books to check out of the library. I did read them. However, when it was time to return the books, I couldn’t find them in the jumble of our household mess. Days went by. Fines increased until I was afraid to show my face in the library.

This early experience of returning very late library books and paying fines probably added to my later obsession with avoiding tardiness of any kind. Fortunately, at that point in history, I collected soda pop bottles from around the neighborhood. Each one returned to the grocery store earned a few cents and eventually enough to pay my fines. To this day, I remember the joy of finding a lost book under a pile of clothes or other stack of household debris. Then came the sinking feeling of discovering how much I owed the library.

Fortunately, school did not remain the only positive influence in my life. I did find a place to belong in a church. I also found a relationship with God which was totally outside the experience of anyone in my family. This put me on a path away from the values and activities of my family and caused tension in our relationships that lasted several years.

Reading the Holy Bible provided a source of ideas and values that I had never known about before. I had never had any real instruction in morality or wisdom as a child. For the first time, I had an influence that was character forming and provided
guidance for living. It was here that reading became a search for deeper meaning and significance and met a craving I had not recognized before that time.

As a teenager, I managed to look beyond the horse and dog stories in the library and found myself reading *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo. The emotionally charged story of real love and sacrifice touched me deeply so that I felt like I was in another world. A whole new appreciation for classical literature emerged and I could hardly wait to read Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. That selection made a deep impression. Compared to these great books, all other literature in the future would be found wanting. It was at this juncture that I realized that reading was more than a pastime or an escape when the noise at home grew too loud. It was a doorway into great thoughts and offered perspectives on human experience I had never considered.

In the next years, I switched from entertaining fiction stories to more non-fiction, specifically books on personal growth issues. Of greatest interest were books on emotional healing, the children of alcoholics, and spiritual development. In work for an earlier master’s degree, I wrote a research paper listing over thirty books I had read on these topics for the literature review. By that time, I had developed a dependence upon reading material as a way to obtain information that was essential for going forward with my life. I put more trust in books than I did in live relationships with counselors or teachers.

Because my college education was more ‘hit and miss’ than progressive development towards a major, I did not study philosophy and only skimmed the surface of math, science and English. Later on, I studied most of these topics on my own.

**Writing**
My mother believed that further education was a waste of time. Since she had only gone to the 10th grade, she could not see why anyone would need more knowledge than enough to survive. A daughter should marry and have children like she had done. In her day and in her social circle growing up, that was all that was expected. In my day, girls talked about having a job and possibly even a career in the future. One would have to go to college, or at least further training beyond high school, to create that possibility.

Mother was not one of those parents who would help with homework. She confessed to being an utter failure when it came to math, and many of the other subjects did not interest her. But when it came to writing, the stand-up comic in her came out, and she practically did our homework for us. All we had to do was to announce a writing homework assignment, and she was all there. She sat with us and coached each line along until it was perfect comedy.

In later years once all the stresses of raising children were far behind, Mother joined a women’s club and managed to be elected as Secretary. She wanted that job more than any other as it gave her a chance to write the minutes of each meeting. As she stood to read what she had written about the previous meeting, a hush fell over the group as they waited for June’s comedic take on the persons and events of the month. Reading over her reports, I was inspired by her ability to capture the humor in the mundane details of life.

After she passed away, I found a written assignment she had saved that had my brother’s name on it. I offered it to him, but he reminded me that it was not really his. Mother had pretty much written the whole thing. I don’t know if that is where I learned to love writing, but I am sure her enthusiasm had something to do with it. That was one area
where she almost gave full support and encouragement. Or was she merely having fun with our assignments? I think the latter is true.

In elementary school, I was often assigned to write a “report”. To do a report, all that was necessary was having access to a set of encyclopedias. As we took our information directly, word for word, from a published book, our writing must have alerted the teachers to what we were doing. The language would have been a dead giveaway. Apparently, plagiarism was not an issue then; neither was creativity or learning how to write well. Until I went to college, writing skill did not impress me as important, and then I only began to find that I had a lot to learn. Looking back on that period of my life, the papers I wrote, up until I was thirty-years old, were full of errors and pathetic attempts at humor. It was as if I had learned how to write from my mother instead of my English teachers. The only difference was that my mother’s spelling and grammar were better than mine.

In more recent times, instruction for writing essays and stories has become more strategic and detailed. A typical book on grammar and composition (e.g. Chapman, 1996) contains hundreds of rules that I do not remember ever hearing in my years of education.

For Christmas one year in my early teens, I received a diary that had a tiny lock and key. I am not sure if diaries were popular before that year, but writing in my own private, little book presented a novel challenge. The task of writing regularly in a diary meant that I would have to think about what had happened in my life that was worth noting and perhaps apply reflective thought on what the events meant to me. Though I did not keep up the habit for long, the diary provided a stimulus for thinking about what was important. Later, journals had the same effect. Rereading a journal written during a
trying time in my life revealed how I had been thinking and evaluating circumstances. Reflecting on my earlier reflections showed how I had changed my thinking through the decades.

In 1990, I was challenged to write a book. My husband and I were asked to speak at a seminar called Working Together as a Married Couple at a large missionary conference in Illinois. The Urbana Missions Conference was held every three years during the week between Christmas and New Year’s Eve on the campus of the University of Illinois. It was attended by over 20,000 college-aged students from around the world. For my part, I spoke about the various challenges I had experienced during my time as a missionary in Papua New Guinea to the one hundred or so students who attended the seminar. Among those challenges were difficult adjustments to culture and how they affected my marriage and family. After the seminar was finished, a group of young women came forward to ask if I had written a book about my experiences. When I told them I had not, they encouraged me to do so.

It occurred to me then that speaking about an experience reached only a small audience, but writing a book expanded that audience by untold numbers. A person’s experiences may be shared verbally and possibly be passed on to others. In the process however, the story could become twisted or exaggerated out of proportion. Writing a book would set the record straight and be passed around to those who were interested in knowing more about missionary life. A book is a permanent, unchanging record that reaches far beyond my ability to communicate by word of mouth. It gives one perspective that existed in the point of time when it was written. The readers may interpret the story however they wish. They may fill in the blanks of things left unwritten from their own
imaginations without the opportunity to clarify information. In the end, however, a book speaks for itself.

The actual writing happened in stages. First, I wrote freely about all the things I thought were important to my life story. The second stage was sorting out the stories into a logical pattern. This is where having read a lot of books came in handy. Reading had imprinted on my mind how a story should be laid out. I started out with a scene from my incredible life as a new missionary asking the question, “How am I going to do this?” Each chapter was an answer to that question. My editor at the publishing house was a tremendous help in showing me how to structure the chapters to keep readers engaged with the story.

Now, looking back on an earlier period of my life, I can read what I was thinking twenty years ago and compare to what I think today. I am able to see how I have changed, not just from my memory or my imagination. What I was thinking then is a permanent record and a mile marker in the span of a lifetime.

Writing a book gives me an opportunity to see my life as an object in much the same way as a person views words as objects. In other words, I can look at my life from the outside as an object to analyze and understand my existence as part of a larger reality. This is very abstract thinking and is seen as the epitome of literate experience (Bruner and Weisser, 1991).

**Learning**

From childhood until well after college, I do not think I had a plan for learning or growth in my life. Only slowly did it dawn on me that I could make a plan and follow it, or develop a strategy for learning and become more skilled. In my early years, I simply
did what I was told to do. Homework, chores, or leisure activities were there, and so I
complied with whatever was necessary to do life.

Teachers try to lead students to take more initiative with their lives. Those who
respond to that leadership often become the star athletes and the scholarship winners. It
was not until my mid twenties that I realized I could plan for growth and learning. Life
did not have to just happen. I did have the power to direct the path to some degree. When
I finally did move ahead full steam into personal growth, I realized that the messages
were all around me calling for initiative. Books, magazines, movies, television
commercials and more bombarded me daily with words like “overcome”, “thrive”, and
“take control”. It was a long slow process, first of overcoming my difficult childhood
wounds, and then blooming where I was planted, to use the overused cliché.

I include this piece of personal history here because it is key to understanding
something about my culture. Though I missed out on a lot of stimulus for growth in my
younger years, I see that my culture encourages thought, ideas, opinions, learning new
skills, development of mind and body. There is a belief that if we work at something,
plan, practice, and persevere through setbacks and difficulty, we will obtain what we
seek. Stories abound of those who have achieved great things because of this kind of
gumption (Duckworth, 2016). Perhaps because of training in their homes and/or schools,
some come by it when young. Others in my culture never arrive at that state, or learn late.

Memory

In a literate culture such as mine, a person may make a list of the things that
should be committed to memory and the things that can be looked up in books or other
written sources. The number of things on the first list grows smaller as time goes by. My
cell phone records all the phone numbers I used to have in my memory. As I read about all that is accessible on the Internet, my concept of the total amount of information available to me is staggering.

In a recent conversation with my son, in the space of thirty minutes, he looked up at least five different topics on his cell phone, as we spoke. Everything we wondered about was just a few clicks away; the full details would unfold before us. Technological developments take people beyond the point of being literate in the original sense, and into a hyper-literate state. The combination of reading skill plus the ability to search the Internet creates unique demands on the brain. Hundreds of messages crowd the screen competing for attention. This soon drives the brain into mental fatigue, which then requires mental disengagement and disconnection in order to find relief (Goleman, 2013, p. 56).

The messages that bombard our daily lives come from every direction. Not only cell phones, but television, radio, billboard signs, junk mail, yard signs, vehicles, business windows, sidewalks, and even the sky, carry words that beckon the readers to buy, sell, vote, protest, or change some aspect of their lives and their thinking about their lives. Due to a mix of diverse or conflicting opinions, what begins as an attempt to become well-informed often becomes a source of confusion. Because of technology, we memorize less and less in favor of being able to access information as needed. With the reduction of memorization comes the reduction of brain development (p. 24).

In summary, my experience becoming literate has taken me all the way from speaking simple language as a toddler to analyzing my life using the literacy skills
learned over a period of seventy years. I cannot imagine what my life would be like if I
not had the opportunity to become literate.
Chapter 4

**Literacy in an oral culture**

In this chapter, the description of a particular cultural event for the Folopa people serves to demonstrate the major values that drive the culture. As Schieffelin (2005) observes about a similar group in Papua New Guinea, “Many of the normative principles of a society may pertain to behavior in particular cultural scenarios, and the organization of the society may be to a large degree maintained by the processes entailed in them (p. 3).” By this, he means that the principles or values of a culture may be seen in their “scenarios”, or important events, and shown to be the symbols of the cultural worldview.

In addition to describing the principal ritual event, I describe the events since then that have marked the journey into literacy for the oral Folopa people. The focus here is to show how the values of the Folopa people are deeply imbedded in oral culture. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the most significant and powerful forms of communication are found in dreams, rituals, and the spoken word.

The awareness of the contrast between oral and literate culture grew out of various academic disciplines during the twentieth century. Studies of ancient languages, such as Greek and Latin, and their works of literature that survived through hundreds of years, revealed differences from modern writing that spurred researchers to theorize about the causes for the differences. Eric Havelock (1991) summarized the research that led to the articulation of a description of what is now called *orality* and *oral culture* (p. 11).

Since these literary discoveries, the concept of a culture being based in oral tradition has been further examined and applied to modern cultures that remain oral in
nature. These cultures either lack opportunities to become literate or they retain a strong tradition of orality despite having literacy education.

One such culture is that of Papua New Guinea (PNG). As observed earlier in Chapter 1, this South Pacific island nation does not have a long history of educational opportunities. In isolated, mountainous villages, thousands of citizens eke out a living where Western influences have relatively recently arrived. The village of Fukuta in the Southern Highlands Province is a good example of an oral culture where education in any form has only been available for the last 35 years. What I describe here took place before literacy had made an impact on the villagers.

**Foke**

In all of my years among the Folopa people, the most outstanding event I became aware of was *Foke* (pronounced *foe kay*). The name of this event is derived from two morphemes, *fo* which means ‘talk’, ‘word’, or ‘language; and *ke* which means ‘valuable substance’ or ‘seed’. It implies something from which valuable substance grows through words or language. Occurring only rarely, this event was very important to the identity of the Folopa people.

It all began in 1979 when my husband sought to help the people find a cure for a disease that ravaged the local pig population. Pigs are a very central part of the culture and represent a family’s wealth and status as well as a food source. In order to keep pigs alive, it meant identifying the disease and consulting a veterinarian to find out if it was curable. The disease turned out to be swine anthrax and was not curable. However, it was preventable with an injection of vaccine for the healthy pigs.
A visiting doctor and my husband went from one end of the village to the other and vaccinated every pig that could be found. From that time on, no more pigs died of anthrax. Jubilantly, we were informed that at long last they could celebrate Foke. We did not immediately understand the connection, but in time it became clear that the event called for the killing of a very large number of pigs; at least one hundred pigs were needed in order to be effective. We had just cleared the way for the feast of the century, and within two years the number of healthy pigs had quadrupled.

As everyone anticipated what, in our minds, we envisioned as a huge feast with a day of killing pigs, cooking them, and giving out portions to everyone who was owed a favor, excitement rose with each passing day. My neighbor said it would be like Christmas and everyone would give gifts of meat to one another.

Our awareness that something different was occurring began late one night as we were about to go to bed. Muffled chanting and rhythmic pounding sounds descended from the nearby da be, ‘penis house’, or long house where most of the men of the village slept.

Figure 18. A typical dape Men’s house in a Folopa village (Photo: Anderson archives)
The next day we asked several of the men what had taken place, and tried to make sense of the answers. No one seemed to be able to articulate exactly what they were experiencing.

“What is Foke?” we asked.

“It makes everything good,” was the consensus of opinion. Everyone seemed to know that things were going to be “made good”, but trying to explain how this was to be achieved was very difficult. We were left to merely observe day after day the preparations for what we thought was the actual feast.

After many conversations and questions, the nature of Foke began to emerge. Night after night, week after week, the men gathered in the da be just as it was getting dark. They spent time donning their old, handmade headbands decorated with shells, animal fur, and feathers. As time went on, the decorations became more elaborate and the process was begun earlier in the afternoon.

Once the bodies of the men were sufficiently prepared, they formed a line, two abreast, down the center isle of the house. Each man held an axe in one hand and a bow with arrows in the other hand.

As more and more men joined in each night, the lines became longer, necessitating spreading out into the be belaa, which is the flat open ground in front of the house. Then the chanting began as the village shaman, positioned in one corner of the building, called out a rapid, high-pitched stream of language that we could not understand. The men began to march slowly facing the front of the house, out into the be belaa, all the while the sounds of synchronized slapping of their flat, wide feet on the floor boards, and then on the hard earth outside, produced the rhythm. The shaman called
out the twenty-second “verse” and fell silent as the men responded with a chorus of “ya, ya, ya, ya”. Then they retreated and marched back into the house before marching out again and repeating the whole cycle.

This went on all night for weeks. As it was only twenty yards from our bedroom, it meant some difficult nights for sleeping as the sessions continued. We asked what this had to do with Foke and got the impression that they were practicing for a demonstration during the feast.

Once there were about fifty men involved, the sessions began during the afternoon. Women (especially mothers) and children gathered to watch the men dress up in their traditional warfare outfits, for that is what we learned they were doing. Everyone was delighted with the splendor of seeing sights few had seen before, or at least since the days of raids on other villages. Those had been outlawed by the government and ended around 1960.

When we asked repeatedly what the shaman was saying when he called out his chants, the response was always the same. “It is called Siyo fo (show foe). You don’t want to know what it means. It is about the old days of fighting.” After some additional hints, I decided that the shaman was using war cries as in the days of cannibalism. This was the type of ritual they used to get up the nerve to attack another village. Later we learned that the shaman cried out a reminder of all the villages they had attacked and killed men, women and children. It was a type of reciting of their history. Everyone knew that those days were over and what they had done was outlawed. But there was something exhilarating and exciting for them about bringing back the old times.
After weeks of the marching, I thought they had had enough practice to revive their skills in whatever it was they were trying to perfect. We asked if they were ready for the Foke yet and they answered, teyo (tay oh), ‘Not yet.’

“How do you know when it is time to have the feast?” we asked.

“We will know. It is teyo.”

When the feast finally took place, we had just left the village for a short break and missed the whole thing. But because we had asked so many questions for so long, the men we worked with were later able to give an account that filled in a lot of the blanks in our knowledge. I think our questions made them do some analysis on their own and realize what the feast was really about.

The thing that made the time right at last was the maturity of the gardens they had planted in September. People had to have a lot of food to feed the crowds of visitors from other Folopa villages who would come. Had we known this, we could have planned our break at a different time. But no one had been able to articulate what it was that made the feast ready to happen before it happened.

And what were the weeks and weeks of chanting about? It was about the ritual of speaking to the spirit world in the environment and causing the gardens to grow. The words of the chants were magical and had power to affect the rain, the soil, the plants, the pigs, and the health of the village. These were words spoken aloud in the context of the powerful warfare rituals. The chants reminded everyone of a day when the words of the men had felt most powerful.

But what about the marching? I had been aware of the pervasive fertility cults in PNG. Here in the heart of the foke was a prime example. The men had started marching
from inside the *da be* ‘penis house’ (obviously considered ‘male’) and came straight
toward the location of the old, round spirit house which had been considered to be
female, before retreating and repeating the cycle many times. This was a clear symbolic
picture of violence against an enemy demonstrating male strength combined with sexual
intercourse extending to the spirit world.

Inside the spirit house, sacred stones had been buried that were symbolic of seeds.
By symbolically fertilizing the seeds, the men were creating life and health for everything
that grew in the environment. The process was empowered by the chants, despite the fact
that the lyrics had to do with death to outsiders. (Could this have been a reason why they
waited until we were gone? Hmm.)

When I finally saw the reality of the fertility ritual, I understood why the
marching had gone on for so long and why the villagers were so happy while this was
taking place, and probably why they did not want to tell us the meaning of the chanting.
Maybe they thought the presence of a different spirit would diminish or enfeeble their
efforts.

I was there to introduce and promote written words. My training and life
experience told me that there was power and potential in what has been written. In my
worldview, the spoken word was not necessarily significant or powerful. It is exactly
what Ong writes about oral cultures. The spoken word has all the significance and the
written word is a stranger. I saw for the first time how much authority and importance the
spoken word, accompanied by rituals and symbols, was to the Folopa people. These
things not only stand for what is meaningful and powerful, but they bring them into being
(Schieffelin, 2005. p. 3). It would be a long time before the written word had that much influence in the culture.

To achieve power and significance, the Folopa people believed that dreams, rituals and spoken words—particularly spoken by a person who had killed many people—were the most important factors to experience. Much of this dealt with life and death—staying alive and keeping one’s family alive, while having control over the life and death of others. In other words—survival.

**The long journey to literacy**

With the *foke* event as a backdrop, our goal to take them from simply surviving and bring them into the twentieth century seemed remote. Literacy could be the pathway to knowledge of the outside world and ideas that we hoped would free them from the narrow view of kill or be killed. The small church in the village had already taken some small steps in that direction by inviting us to introduce further knowledge of Christianity. But it was not an easy road. The PNG government had outlawed warfare, murder and cannibalism. Most villagers were very relieved that these threats no longer existed. But old habits of mind would not die quickly.

Beginning with the story above about the first literacy class in 1975, the development of schooling in the village had some interesting twists and turns. The first readers were enthusiastic and did not waste any time in teaching their close relatives to read and write. At that point, it looked like literacy would take off.

In 1985, we applied for and were granted money from the United States government to build a building in which to hold literacy classes. After a leave of absence for twelve months, we returned to find that the literacy building was no longer where we
left it. It had been disassembled and rebuilt as a larger, two-story building on a new site and renamed as a government elementary school. When we asked why they had done this, the reply was, “You told us it was our school. This is what we wanted to do with our school.”

After the villagers discovered that having “the knowledge of books” was harder to come by than they had thought, educating the young became the most important thing. Village leaders had gone to local government offices to report the building of a new school and had requested the appointment of a teacher. By the time we arrived back, our hopes for teaching literacy faded fast. All the energy now was being poured into a larger goal: getting the first real school in the whole of the language area up and running.

Once a teacher was in place, the long process of educating children began. The age for children to begin school in PNG normally was eight years old. Because the Fukuta school was just starting in an area that had never had a school, older students were admitted. The first year found children from age eight to late teens sharing a large classroom in the new school.

*Figure 19. The first class of students in the Fukuta Village government school (Photo: Anderson archives)*
Difficulty of finding employment in the distant towns had taught the village people a lesson. Without some kind of education, their chances of earning money in the national system were next to impossible. The only factor in favor of hiring Folopa men was that they were known for being hard workers who did not complain about poor living conditions. Therefore, finding low paying labor jobs in the towns and cities, where the accommodations provided were deplorable, was the best they could expect.

Teachers who were sent by the government to the village were several generations ahead of the Folopa in their experience of literacy education. Consequently, they did not understand the culture in this isolated place, even though they were all citizens of the same country. Because PNG traditionally is divided into hundreds of small tribes, and because the teacher was from a different language group, he was considered an outsider. This made him fair game to be treated as a potential enemy. Though teachers are supposed to be respectful of the local citizenry, sometimes they came into the village with an attitude of superiority owing to their advanced knowledge of the world. As a result, their gardens were often vandalized and school materials routinely destroyed.

Seldom did a teacher last more than one school term before leaving and refusing to return. The Folopas were branded as *bus kanakas*, a label taken from the Hawaiian language, and borrowed by Melanesian Pidgin, meaning ‘bush people’, uncivilized in the ways of the national culture.

It was painful to watch the villagers try to understand the school culture. Desperately wanting their children to be eligible for employment in the outside world, they were willing to sacrifice everything they had to make this happen. Paying school fees to the government was a huge obstacle for a people who had no basic income.
Somehow, they came up with the money. However, knowing how to deal with the school system remained their biggest problem.

As I watched their efforts and observed their failures, I began to see how difficult it was, anthropologically speaking, for an isolated, non-literate group to move toward the national culture. The Folopa people had developed little from the so-called “stone age” culture that they were often portrayed as in the larger world community. They had adopted some items from the material culture of the outside, such as bush knives, aluminum cooking pots, and clothing, but the ideational culture would take generations to learn. When this dawned on me, I began to understand the difficulties a preliterate culture faces as the members begin to comprehend the literate world. They did not want to remain isolated, jungle natives—set apart by happening to live in one of the most rugged and treacherous areas of real estate in the country. Nor did they want to be labeled as murdering cannibals, living without any of the benefits of modern society.

**Cultural Pressures**

In cooperation with national standards and expectations, girls were allowed to go to school. Duties in the family’s garden took priority, however. Due to the high cost of school fees, seldom did females continue attending school after three years. Everyone knew that males were the only ones likely to leave the village to find work. In PNG, it is traditional in marriage for the groom’s clan to give money, shells and pigs to the bride’s clan in exchange for her. This is called a bride price. Families later discovered that they could raise the amount of money a groom had to pay to a bride’s relatives if she had some education, thereby creating additional motivation to educate females.
Each year the school added a new class until, in the late 1990s, grades one through five were offered. After finishing five grades, the next option was boarding away from the village and going to the next level which was middle school. Only those with the highest grades were chosen to go on. For this, a family had to pay higher school fees and find a distant relative to house their child for the year.

Remarkably, in the early years of the new century, a few students made it through middle school, high school, and teachers’ college, with a very few managing to return to the village to be teachers to their own people. When this happened, we thought things would improve with the tensions between villagers and teachers. But, a different part of the cultural mix came into play. Instead of viewing the teacher as an outsider, the villagers now were jealous of one of their own making money and not sharing the benefits.

This is one of the characteristics of what is called in PNG the Wontok system. The word wontok comes from the English “one talk”. It refers to the people who speak the same language, and more specifically those who are relatives. Sharing and helping each other is expected in every aspect of life. This sounds good on the surface, but unfortunately, it also results in a lot of problems within families like jealousy and bitterness. It also undermines any motivation for personal success and prosperity. Everything one has must be shared until the worker has nothing left of his own. The whole point of working hard and rising in the world is to gain some kind of reward. When all the rewards are taken away, the reasons to work hard are fewer. As a result, someone from the outside could easily misunderstand the lack of motivation and brand people as lazy.
When the opportunity to become literate first appeared, there was great pressure from families to be one of the first. It was like Black Friday in the United States; everyone lines up waiting for the store to open knowing there are just so many TVs available. Being in the front of the line to learn to read was like getting a key that would magically open doors to a brighter future. There was some mysterious element to reading and writing that would connect them to the outside world. When a student failed, blame was often laid on the teacher, making additional conflicts for him with the villagers.

Culture change

The oral culture of the Folopa was entirely based on their ability to listen and remember. Because there was no literature, every bit of knowledge was passed on verbally. Speakers learned their language in the same way all people learn—words first and then the complexities of grammar. Comparing their language abilities, it could be said that Papua New Guineans are far superior to many in the United States when it comes to language learning. There are hundreds of small language groups, each living across a valley, mountain, or river from another group whose language had to be learned in order to trade and intermarry. These languages were not simply dialects with grammatical similarities. Having examined the grammar papers of many nearby languages, I can attest to the fact that each has its own unique structure and vocabulary. Occasionally, a woman from a non-Folopa speaking village married a Folopa and had to learn the language quickly to survive life in a strange, new place.

Back in the 1970’s, no one in the village spoke the trade language, Melanesian Pidgin. This reduced the likelihood of getting information from the outside. When someone returned from a job outside the area, the reports that they brought back were
skewed by their limited understanding of language, technology and events in the country. One man who had been gone for several years reported that he had learned the secret of “power” while in the city. He explained how he flipped a switch on the wall and the electric light came on. People were not as impressed as he thought they would be, mainly because they had seen light switches in our house. But his proclamation was an example of the belief he had about “power”. There was no other option but to believe it was connected to magic.

Gradually over the years, Pidgin became more commonly used until most everyone now speaks some of this simple language. Technology has made small inroads via rechargeable batteries and solar power to play portable radios. Cheap cell phones now are common and cell towers cover a huge area of the country.

Now, even though literacy has been introduced and years have passed, most of what people know still comes to them through conversations with other people. The belief that literacy is valuable for gaining important information has yet to take hold fully. The old beliefs that power and significance are gained through dreams, rituals and the spoken word remain, though now a person’s influence on the society has been enhanced by education.

Very recent developments are a result of the school culture having matured. Students who have become adults now make lists and prepare for events using written instructions. It is a status symbol to carry books and notebooks around or to have a pencil stuck in a person’s hair. The outward, simple activities of literacy have become commonplace. Deeper understanding of literature, and the information that accompanies
it, has yet to develop and compete with the very deep values of spoken words, dreams, and rituals.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Reflections

Contrasting oral and literate culture, as I have written here about my own American culture and the Folopa culture of Papua New Guinea, reveals some of the basic facts about the two different worldviews. In this chapter, I compare oral and literate characteristics in the areas of information, education, language, physical differences, and relationships. There is a review of my assumptions from Chapter 1 and whether or not they have been confirmed.

Below is a comparison between my Western culture and that of the Folopa people, or group similar to them in regard to an oral versus literate worldview. I recognize that not all oral cultures are the same. Even though differences may exist between oral cultures, there are common elements that researchers have observed.

Information

Oral

Information is gained through; 1) oral speaking and listening in conversation with other people, 2) the spirit world by means of the performance of rituals and having dreams, and 3) visible signs like death and sickness, as interpreted by their beliefs about invisible spiritual powers that operate in the environment. Without any other input from other worldviews, orally trained people are left to believe what they have always believed about what causes events. With a tendency towards a more animistic religious orientation (or, what we in the Western world might refer to as superstition), primary oral societies use sorcery or magic rituals to find answers to life’s questions. When something important is unknown—like why a person is sick or has died—the spirit world is consulted by mediums or shamans to determine a cause. There is no other means of
obtaining the needed answers. They would likely say that spirits who are unhappy with mortals’ behavior are responsible for most of the problems in their world. There is basically one way to think and one interpretation of events.

**Literate**

In literate cultures, information is gained through conversations directly with people, an abundance of written material, including literature, and a variety of technological devices that employ all of the above. Information from multiple sources is available. In fact, the sources are so many that Western people are beginning to feel bombarded by the amount of information offered to them. A person has to choose which sources to believe, possibly leaving them in a state of confusion at times to know who, if anyone, has the true “facts”. The more technology we have, the greater the sources of information and opinions. There are many ways to think and a person must make choices about who to believe. Mixed and conflicting messages asking literates to believe a report arrive alongside reports that ask us not to believe the same information.

The bottom line for information gathering is that, despite the abundance of sources, a literate person can feel confident in being able to find answers to most questions that are logical and rational without having to rely on the supernatural. There are highly literate people who are also religious and choose to believe in supernatural sources of information. However, the culture of the West has moved away from dependence on explanations that appear to defy natural causation. The dependence instead is upon the vast amounts of research available through the internet and libraries. Believability and credibility are closely tied to whether or not the information has been published.
When a literate Westerner confronts an oral learner, there may be subtle messages of rejection and inferiority of the student’s religious beliefs. Literates may demonstrate arrogance about the feelings of superiority of their educational accomplishments (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010, p. 6-7).

Language

Oral

There is no metalinguistic understanding with primary non-literate people. They have no experience in conceiving of words or sounds as isolated, abstract objects. That words can be constructed according to rules of grammar and have names for the role they play in grammar is an unknown concept. They do not associate sounds with symbols and lack the ability to separate sounds in a word. In other words, non-literate people cannot initially sound out a word from individual letter symbols. This is a skill that must be patiently taught. They may not be able initially to focus on letter symbols and see small differences between them.

Without the ability to construct grammar according to learned rules, composing sentences relies on patterns of spoken language in the writer’s own first language. Going directly from a first language to learning to write in English grammar is doubly challenging. Herriman (1987) writes,

The process of expository prose writing involves constantly attending to the syntax and semantics of language. The choice of words and grammatical constructions, especially in relation to details such as tense, mood, and aspect of the verb, is important to conveying the precise intention of the writer (p. 167).
A new writer in an ESL setting who has never learned these concepts before in any language has a greater struggle to understand the expectations of a teacher who does not understand where the pre-literate person has started from. Olson (1991) states that a metalinguistic awareness can only come from the process of becoming literate (p. 259). A person who has never conceived of a word as an object, or a sound as a part of a word, must begin by developing these skills.

One of the most difficult things to teach ESL students is phonics. Metalinguistic awareness is not appropriated quickly, particularly in students who are older. Oral students memorize what they are told about the alphabet. They find it much more difficult to learn to sound out words as they are required to learn that a word is an object or a series of sounds.  

**Literate**

From the time a child enters an educational system, the concepts necessary for metalinguistic awareness are taught. The early grades introduce symbols representing ways to write language, whether it be for single sounds, syllables, or complicated graphemes. Grammar is stressed with an early learning of names of nouns, verbs, etc. Proper structure for written sentences and compositions are taught in ever increasing complexity all the way from the elementary grades through the university level.

Speaking ability in a foreign language may be more difficult if the student has never learned a second language. Tuning in to new sounds provides a challenge, but literate students will pick up the metalinguistic requirements easily. The demands for learning vocabulary may take more time as brain structures for memorizing may be weak.  

**Education**
Oral

Communities do not educate as much as they live life and demonstrate their values and skills before their children. There is usually no formal model for training the young other than listening to the myths and legends of their ancestors. Some oral cultures stress memorizing details of their history in order to preserve memories of ancestors. Values are passed along through stories. The value of formal education is not so much for what is learned, but is more for the paper certificate of achievement that qualifies a person for employment.

Where the culture is predominantly oral and a school system exists, the model is patterned after schools in Western countries. However, the requirement of rote memory of material tends to be the norm for instruction. There are several possibilities for the motivation behind this method, but my observation is that it is because there is not a complete understanding of what school is supposed to achieve for a student. Is it a means to an end, such as employment, or a process to equip a person for life?

Seldom does the curriculum call for problem-solving assignments. The Folopa children go through the motions learning by rote, hoping that they will be qualified to advance to the next level and eventually reach the goal of employment. Employment means money, and money means more power and status.

While oral societies have higher level thinking skills, these are usually in a completely different context than reading and writing. For example, a hunter sees signs in the forest that an animal lives close by. He is able to put a number of clues together and create a strategy for finding the animal. The abilities are present, but the training of the abilities often has a very different application.
Literate

Having a formal education through an organized school system is the norm for a literate culture. Because a formal education is so highly valued by the culture, there is a great deal of pressure upon a student to do well and go on to higher levels. Some students prefer schools specializing in careers and trades, but even these are obtained through a formal training program. A self-taught person is not considered fully prepared, making education credentials very important.

The model for school has traditionally consisted of students sitting in classrooms, seated in rows of chairs, and listening to a single instructor lecture. In the Western context, questioning the teacher is accepted behavior. As well as giving students information, the goal is to develop their ability to think, reason, and solve problems. To this end, teachers try to create curriculum that gives students opportunities to learn these skills.

Western education has goals that will lead students to ‘higher level’ thinking abilities. Usually this means some form of analysis and working with abstract concepts. Oral learners operate much more in the concrete realm of thought, preferring stories as a means of communicating principles and ideas.

When a teacher asks an oral student what a character is a lesson illustration is thinking, the answer is likely to be more about the immediate context than their feelings or ideas. The Folopa people have words for some feelings, but a discussion about feelings is rare. They can discuss anger and the results of someone’s anger, but they did not seem able to discuss many of the other feelings that Westerners have identified like embarrassment, self-pity, or helplessness.
Physical differences

Oral

Upon examining the brains of oral subjects using advanced fMRI testing, scientists have found differences in brain structures from those of literate subjects (Chyl et al., 2018). Ong, writing before these kinds of tests were available, referred to the observable differences in behavior and speech of oral culture people as alternate “mentalities”. Goswami (2004) notes,

PET studies have shown that the functional organization of the brain differs in literate and illiterate adults. Portuguese women in their sixties who had never learned to read because of lack of access to education were compared with Portuguese women from the same villages in word and nonword repetition tasks. It was found that totally different brain areas were activated during nonword repetition for the illiterate versus literate participants. Learning to read and write in childhood thus changes the functional organization of the adult brain (p. 8).

As brain structures change throughout a person’s life, learning and growing new structures is entirely possible, even in older learners. The brain structures in oral people are a result of greater development in memorizing information and they show greater ability in creating and maintaining relationships, as these are vital in oral culture. One reason for a greater ability in relationships with oral learners is that they have learned to focus on faces and interpret facial expressions. Literate learners have learned to focus on letters and symbols, disregarding font styles and sizes of print, and do not do as well on focusing on faces (Knowland & Thomas, 2014).
Unfortunately, the differences in people from oral cultures have been viewed as deficiencies by the more literate cultures, sending a message that non-literate people have less value. Ong (1989) observed that many people of oral culture view literate Westerners as deficient in knowing facts without looking them up somewhere and in being aware of the relationships to people around them.

**Literate**

The brain structures of all people differ in some way (even identical twins). But the structures of literate people reflect the dominance of skills associated with reading, writing, and analysis. Areas dedicated to memorizing and retaining memories are often less developed because of the literate persons’ reliance on references in libraries, books, and the internet’s instant access to just about any knowledge known to man (Knowland & Thomas, 2014; Goswami, 2004). As access to knowledge increases via the internet, the need for growth of the brain is diminished. Less work for the brain means less growth of the brain’s ability to think. Brains that continue to learn, memorize, think, analyze, read and write will continue to develop new structures.

Brains that have been exposed to literacy since their youth process information in a particular way that is different from orally trained brains. Either type of brain finds it very difficult to understand the thinking of the other type. Literate brains think through the tip of their pencil or the tips of their fingers as they write. Oral brains process one thought at a time, and usually as they speak.

**Relationships**

**Oral**
The oral learner relies heavily upon memory. As with the Folopa people, details about relationships must be carried in the memory so that important obligations, of which there are many, will not be forgotten. Everyone knows exactly who should do what and for whom, and they know who has been negligent.

Life cannot be carried on without having close relational ties. Everything that is important happens within the context of relationships with other people. Oral culture people are very dependent on interactions with other people so have developed better ability to observe and understand the people around them. As stated above, the brains of oral people test better than literate on recognizing facial expressions and remembering faces.

**Literate**

People in Western cultures differ in priorities of relationships. In the United States, in general, relationships are becoming more distant due to technology. Many of the writers on orality note that literacy has given a person the option of being alone (Ong, 1982). Thoughts can be expressed through writing, and writers can exchange thoughts with others through the various publishing media. People can become independent and isolated, keeping in touch through social media and never really speak to another person. People can live their lives without having any real relationships. And all this can happen because of literacy combined with technology. Ong (1982) observes that Western individualism developed because literacy allowed people to function in a society without any direct communication with each other, making close relationships unnecessary.

**Significance of findings**
For those tasked with helping students from oral culture to develop skills in speaking, reading and writing English, it is essential to have an understanding of the characteristics of *orality*. From my early experience with oral learners, I realize that expectations I had about how to teach literacy were unrealistic due to my lack of knowledge about them. Learning how to read their own language was not very difficult for many, especially the young. Learning to comprehend written material was more challenging. Finally, being able to value and access the wealth of information in literature was many years away.

For those who have had no previous education, learning a new language is difficult. Developing the metalinguistic skills (and new brain structures) to learn to read and write in a new language presents an even greater challenge and requires intense practice and time.

Teachers need to have a better understanding of the difficulties their students face when they come to an ESL class. New brain structures for reading and writing can be developed, but time and patience is required for both teacher and students. Classes are often too large for individual attention. Unaccustomed to learning in a classroom that is in many ways impersonal and lacking in relationships, students feel lonely. Often discouraged about apparent failures, oral culture students drop out and give up trying to learn. Only those who are strongly motivated and who experience some sense of progress continue.

**Comments on assumptions**

(1) A culture that is primarily oral may have an approach to education and learning that contrasts greatly with a highly literate culture.
The Folopa people demonstrated that their model of education was based on modeling. Once school was introduced, they were able to follow a pattern that was given them. The purpose and intent of education was not clear to them and they were more likely to rely on oral culture patterns of behavior.

(2) Introducing literacy to a person from an oral culture requires an increased understanding of the point at which the learner is beginning. This includes understanding the characteristics of oral culture.

Very young learners are capable of adapting to a school system quickly. Older learners require much more time and a host of novel strategies for increasing metalinguistic awareness before writing and reading proficiency can be accomplished.

(3) Oral learners have no metalinguistic skills. In other words, they are not able to view language analytically, viewing words as units that can be labeled and understood as being part of a grammar.

Teachers must carefully build awareness from very simple to more complex. Older learners will take a lot of time to build these skills.

(4) Strong motivation and willingness to persevere are keys to learning new skills, particularly for older people.

Learning to read and write in English is very difficult and takes a lot of motivation to stay engaged. In order to encourage motivation, a teacher must use a lot of positive feedback and encouragement. For example, a teacher must be aware of their own body language, making sure that movements are welcoming, face-to-face, and encourage relationship. Facial expressions should always show interest in and care for the student. Negative body language such as shrugging of the shoulders, eye rolling, and frowning at
a student should never happen. (Bigalow, 2010). Students should never be harshly
corrected or shamed, especially in front of the other students.

Also required is a willingness to repeat endlessly even the simplest things being
taught.

(5) If the new skill does not produce the expected benefits, motivation will die.

Older students will quit trying if they feel they are not progressing, or if others are
learning more quickly than they are. Low education learners need to be in a group
together so they are not competing with faster learners.

(6) Some rewards and benefits must accompany learning new skills in order for
motivation to continue.

There has to be a payoff for the learners. Teachers need to find out what the
student wants most and help them reach their goals.

(7) Becoming literate in a person’s first language (L1) is much easier than
learning to read and write for the first time in a second (L2) language.

From my Folopa experience, I can see that learning in one’s own language is
easier. This is also an observation found in the literature on language learning.

Limitations

Since 1973 I have watched the progress of the Folopa people as they slowly but
surely gained access to the world outside their rainforest homeland. They are a unique
group with an equally unique culture. With hundreds of cultural groups around the world
represented in the number that immigrate into the United States, there will be a variety of
oral and literate people who may or may not match the description of the Folopa. I am
most familiar with that group and how those people closely resemble the oral cultures that have been described by Ong and other researchers.

As I work with refugees and immigrants from around the world, I am looking closely for signs of oral characteristics and resulting problems. For instance, much of the lesson material used in ESL classrooms use cartoon types of illustrations. One lesson showed an elephant sitting in a chair reading a newspaper and asked, “What is the elephant doing?” The students were bewildered. What was that strange creature that looks half elephant and half human? What was it holding between its front legs/arms? The rest of the lesson showed other animals doing human activities and was equally mystifying. Decoding small, poorly drawn illustrations is hard enough without adding the complications of fantasy elements which students are not familiar with.

In another case, a middle-aged female student who has been through trauma and loss has been trying to learn English. Her progress has been painfully slow. At last, she is showing signs of learning after six months of almost no response to teaching. She is smiling instead of looking lost and empty. Hesitant still, she will now repeat words and answer a basic question, “What is this?” She is almost able to write her name though she still cannot hold a pencil “properly”.

The research literature points out the difficulties of learning more about these people as they are unable to express and articulate the deeper issues they may be feeling about learning to read and write in the classroom. It is difficult to get inside the head of another culture with whom I do not share a language. Even when a language is shared, it is still hard as the oral person has not developed the ability to be analytical about their own experience.
Future Research

A detailed description of what is needed in future research is presented by Bigalow and Schwarz (2010). Among the most important needs is to determine what type of learning setting works best with pre-literate (oral) students. Classroom settings that are mixed with literate students present a negative environment where oral students become easily discouraged. Documentation on other approaches to literacy are needed. Of particular interest in new studies would be factors of time allowed for progress, relationships within the group, and positive feedback to students even when progress is slow. As mentioned above, the use of culturally familiar story-telling, music, and cultural items for discussion are very important to incorporate.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this chapter, a summary of the learning from the thesis process will be discussed through the lens of the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

1. How do the cultural values of the Folopa people give insight into teaching pre-literate and non-literate ESL learners?

In Chapter 5, the differences between oral and literate cultures were described using the Folopa people as an example of an oral culture. These people typify the state of the oral learner in that their brain structures have never adapted to the skills needed for reading, writing, and analysis using metalinguistic awareness. They had to start from the same place many pre-literate people start from when beginning to learn in the English-speaking context. Their cultural background did not afford any exposure to literature and most information was transmitted orally and face-to-face.

Older people needed to have new information about sounds and symbols repeated many times before the building of new skills could be accomplished. Even for younger students, a great deal of time is needed to develop the initial skills necessary to progress to a literate state. Time and patience with positive feedback is a requirement for ESL teachers of oral learners.

2. How does my own experience of becoming literate give insight into the values of Western education?

I have observed in my early years up until my current age that my culture is totally dependent upon being literate. To the degree that a person wishes to rise economically and in social status, a higher level of education, training, and literacy skills
are required. Credentials are built on levels of proven accomplishment via educational
degrees and the publishing of written materials. For pre-literate immigrants learning
English, the gap is enormous and is almost impossible to cross.

My understanding of issues for oral learners is limited to my years of experience
with the Folopa people. Working now with refugees and immigrants learning English, I
see similar traits. An observation I see again and again in the faces of English students is
the “blank stare”. This is described as an emotionless look on the face of a student that
registers neither comprehension nor responsiveness to information being conveyed by a
teacher. When students do not understand, or they are not sure what they are being told, it
shows on their faces. The stare is blank because they are afraid to acknowledge that they
do not understand and they do not know how to respond in a safe way. There may be a
fear of rebuke from the teacher or embarrassment for not knowing when they think they
are expected to understand. I know it well because I experienced it so often myself; I did
not understand the language I was hearing, or the Folopas did not understand my
language responses. To hear and fail to understand feels bad and frightening in many
respects. I learned what failure feels like, and when I see it in the faces of students, it
makes me want to do something to help alleviate the pain.

3. How can these contrasting experiences with oral and literate culture provide
insight for future teaching of literacy to ESL students?

Recommendations for teachers of pre-literate ESL students follow from my
experience. After many years of watching people learn, I recognize the need for an
understanding of the process that must take place. New brain structures must develop in
the areas of metalinguistic awareness. New concepts for objectifying language must
emerge where none had existed before. For those who are having a difficult time connecting to the early stages of literacy, finding a person who can introduce concepts in the person’s (L1) language may help. Even using some simple vocabulary in that language can help make the sound to symbol connections.

Reading literature and research about orality would help the new ESL teacher. For the training of new teachers, orality should be a topic required for everyone to study. Reading a book such as Bonny Norton’s *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation* (2013) would be beneficial as the author describes in detail the concerns that pre-literate, oral learners have expressed about being in a classroom and a society that looks down upon them.

One very important recommendation is that the prospective ESL teacher, not only understand the language learning process, but understand the social and emotional reactions that go along with that process. Having either an extensive cross-cultural background or a cross-cultural acquaintance, who is close enough to be a source of orientation for what goes on inside the person who is a refugee or immigrant trying to learn English, would be very helpful. People who have come through the process and understand the obstacles and emotions should be welcomed speakers in a training program.

Recently, I had a student who was a university graduate in his home country. After struggling with mostly pre-literate students for weeks, it was refreshing to have someone to teach that understood grammar and was very literate in his own language. Again, I was reminded about the gap that exists between the literate person and the
primarily oral person. It is not easy to get into the world that each one is experiencing, but it is necessary for ESL teachers to do everything they can to understand that world.

**How this study has changed me**

My biggest eye-opening event was in 2008 when I first studied orality in a university class on literacy. After reading a number of sources including Walter Ong’s book, *Orality and Literacy*, I recognized the true nature of the problem that my husband and I had faced when we spent years teaching the Folopa people to read and write. An analogy might be me putting together a complicated computer from a kit and finding I had several important pieces left over once I was finished. Looking around I see the instruction manual and realize that the computer may not ever work because I did not have the instructions to follow. That is how I felt when I realized that the Folopa people could not be expected to incorporate literacy into their lifestyle quickly.

Reading articles such as Bigalow and Schwarz (2010), Bialystok (2017), Olson (1991), and others furthered my knowledge of the struggles of oral culture students who want to learn to speak, read and write English. The research has gone far beyond the writings of Walter Ong and others who described oral culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Much more is known about brain development and its connection to learning. In the past, researchers and teachers thought that the possibilities for older students to learn were very limited. Thanks to research on brain growth, it is now known that older students can learn; it just takes longer than for younger students.

The most significant change in me since beginning this study has been a desire to accomplish two things before I retire (being that I am already way past normal retirement age). The first is to have an opportunity to teach an oral culture person enough to help
that person develop metalinguistic awareness. The female student mentioned above is a prime case. Just seeing her face light up instead of looking blank is a great source of motivation for me. I want to see her arrive at a place where she is able to sound out some simple words, connecting the symbols with the sounds. Being able to identify simple words from sight would also be a leap forward. These and many other beginner skills are yet to be learned.

My second desire would be to influence the teaching of ESL in some way so that oral culture is not only recognized in students, but also accommodated for. I know that this is already happening in that students are allowed to repeat ESL levels. What I would love to research would be trying to teach a small group of pre-literate adults just the metalinguistic level, and perhaps have them learn to spell words in their own language before attempting English words.

With the current advancements in brain science, I believe the theories for language learning will also advance in the coming years, as predicted in “Educating the adult brain: How the neuroscience of learning can inform educational policy” by Knowland and Thomas (2014). An awareness of the physical differences between oral and literate brains alone cannot help but alter people’s attitudes and beliefs about educating non-literate learners. ESL teachers must change as well, making room for a deeper understanding of what is required to accommodate the needs of the oral learner.
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Appendix A

Folopa Syntax

I. Introduction

Folopa is a synthetic language (Demham & Lobeck 2010) spoken by approximately 2500 people who live in a vast rain forest in Papua New Guinea. In this paper, I propose to examine the syntax of the Folopa language, giving an overview of the major structures.

There are twelve villages spread out over 1000 square miles in the Southern Highlands and Gulf Provinces. None of the villages have ever had an expatriate person living in them for any extended period except the village of Fukutao, where my family and I lived on and off over a period of thirty-four years, from 1973 to 2007. Each village speaks a variation of the language that would constitute a dialect, with the northernmost dialect barely able to comprehend the language spoken in the southernmost village. From my studies, I believe the syntactic structure remains the same between villages. The main differences are with the vocabulary.

II. Sentence Structure

The pattern for sentence structure is SOV, or Subject Object Verb. A simple sentence construction is as follows.

\[ \text{Whi} \quad \text{yuwi} \quad \text{dalepo.} \]
\[ \text{man} \quad \text{dog} \quad \text{hit} \quad \text{‘(A) man hit (a) dog.’} \]

A complex sentence construction is as follows:

\[ \text{Kale we} \quad \text{mo ti} \quad \text{hut-uraalu,} \]
\[ \text{the water very truly go up-while} \]
\[ \text{dowasi hasi} \quad \text{topo pea bosen} \quad \text{-□□□,} \]
big mountain top all surpass -SAME SUBJECT

depend mi tōi terae hor -alep. seven meter very truly pass go up-PAST IND

‘The water, while completely covering the mountain tops, covered (them) by 7 meters.’

The free translation into English has the English pattern Subject (water) Verb (covered) Object (mountain top). Folopa expressed this thought in three separate clauses each ending in a form of verb in the order SOV. The first dependent clause ended with:

/-uraalu/ SIMULTANEOUS, suffixed to the verb /ho-/ ‘go up’

/ho-t-uraalu/ go up-do-SIM ‘while going up’

(The /-t-/ literally means ‘do’ but indicates a transitive form of the verb)

The second dependent clause ends in

/-olo/ SAME SUBJECT, suffixed to the verb /bose/ ‘surpass’ with /n/ indicating transitive. It also indicates that the action of the verb has been completed.

The final verb in the last clause, which is always the independent clause, is marked with tense and one of the three sentence types (declarative, imperative, interrogative).

/-alepo/ PAST TENSE + indicative, is a serial verb construction based on

/terae/ ‘pass’ and /ho-/ ‘go up’ and means ‘surpass’

Additional clause verb endings that are not shown in this example are:

-the suffix indicating a change in subject between clauses. /-tepa/

-the suffix indicating a type of conjunction meaning ‘and’ /-yóo/
The subject and object positions in the sentence contain noun phrases. The verb position contains a verb phrase. All clauses end in a form of a verb but may be suffixed with a morpheme converting the verb to a noun.

Graphic Illustration of Folopa Syntax

The number of dependent clauses in the whole structure is limited to three and corresponds to expansions of information on the SUBJECT, the OBJECT, and the VERB. Within those expansions of information are embedded noun phrases and a final verb phrase. These clauses cannot be moved to a different position and thus have constraint rules governing the order of occurrence (Parker & Riley, 70)

A. Noun phrase

1. Noun

Folopa has a class of words that are nouns. They can be identified as such because they are either the subject or the object of a verb. They have distinctive suffixation that is
exclusive to nouns. Examples are suffixes for plural, accompaniment, agency, and topic marker. Folopa does not have any syntactical agreement between nouns and verbs associated with the grammar, as is required in English (Language Files 208).

A verb root can become a noun in a process called nominalization (Payne 225). A suffix is added to the stem as follows:

/te-y-ale-tei/

build-do-PAST-NOM

‘building’ or ‘that which was built’.

An adjective form can be created from a verb root by adding the suffix /-tere/ as in:

/te-y-ale-tere_ona/

build-do-PAST-ADJ thing

‘built thing’

2. Noun phrase structure

The basic formula for a noun phrase is Adjective + Noun. In the complex sentence above, noun phrases are:

a. /kale whi/ ‘the (aforementioned) man’

In this phrase, the word /kale/ ‘the’, is only used when it is referring to someone in the narrative who has already been identified. Otherwise, Folopa does not use articles as in English. An English speaker is tempted to use /kale/ similarly to English, but this is not good grammar. A speaker only uses it when talking about someone whom everyone knows as the subject of the conversation. Other determiners such as numbers and words that locate an object or person like ‘that over there, this here’ do occur.
b. /dowasi hasi topo fea/

big mountain top all

The adjective ‘big’ (an adjective form of the verb /dowa/ ‘to grow’) comes before the noun which is understood to be a compound word, ‘mountain top’. Folopas have chosen to write it as two words, but in this context it is understood as one concept.

In phrase b. above, /fea/ ‘all’ is a free morpheme noun to specify that all the participants are involved as opposed to ‘only’ certain ones. This may be compared to the bound noun suffixes /-tamo/ ‘with’, /-maate/ ‘alone’, /-toroti/ ‘specifically’. They seem to indicate similar concepts, that of who is involved in the action. This word always occurs after the noun, unlike other modifiers. Often /fea/ is modified by /mo/ meaning ‘very’ or ‘truly’ as in /mo fea/ ‘truly all’ or ‘in total’. /fea/ is used in a similar way as in English. It can function as a noun as in the phrase ‘all came’ /fea warapo/, or it can act as an adjective. It could also be interpreted as a pronoun-like word functioning in the structure in a similar way as the Folopa use of pronouns in the phrase, /whi a beterapo/ ‘man he is’. /whirape fea beterapo/ ‘man-PLURAL all are’. One other reason to interpret it as a noun is that it may be suffixed with noun suffixation as in /fea-kele/ all-CONJ and /fea-rape/ all-PLURAL.

c. /sepen mita/ ‘seven meters’

These two words are from English but follow the same pattern of Adjective + Noun.

Noun phrases get very complicated when embedding occurs. The basic formula remains the same. Both the noun and the adjective can be built on a verb. In the following noun phrase compare the Folopa construction with English.

English ‘The boy who came with his uncle to my house’
[NOUN head] plus [modifying clause = Subject + V + Prep Ph + Prep Ph]

Folopa  ‘His uncle-with my house-toward came-ADJ boy’

[Modifying clause =Subject + Object + V-ADJ] plus [NOUN head]

All the words preceding ‘boy’ in the Folopa noun phrase are equivalent to the English phrase above. The verb ‘came’ is marked with a past tense ending plus a suffix that turns a verb root into an adjective. A more complicated example of English would be the addition of modifying phrases and embedded clauses. Folopa may also do this, however both languages have limits on how much information is reasonable to include in one sentence. All the modifying phrases come before the main noun in a Folopa sentence instead of afterward, which is the common pattern in English. Both the subject and the object in the sentence may have embedded phrases and clauses making a sentence potentially very long.

3. Generic nouns

When there is not a specific word in the Folopa language, they often build a phrase based on generic nouns.

/ona/ ‘thing’ /ikoko dale ona/ [nail hit-ADJ thing] ‘nail pounding thing’

In English a speaker might say, “the thing to pound nails with”.

/ala/ ‘characteristic way’ [a dowi ala dere whi] “He bad ways do-ADJ man”

In English a speaker would say, “He is an evil man.”

/tiki/ ‘substance’

/kaae/ ‘similar thing’

/be/ ‘place’

/whi/ ‘man or /so/ ‘woman’ /so whi/ ‘people’
/wei/ ‘liquid’

The order here is Pronoun + Noun Phrase + Verb. When a pronoun is used for the subject the phrase following is more like a reduplication of the subject. In English this would considered redundant. We are taught not to say “he the man did it”. Folopa uses this construction often for emphasis.

4. Folopa Equivalents to Prepositional Phrases in English

The Folopa language relies heavily on verbs to carry meaning for things that are expressed in prepositions in English. There are two basic words that are postpositional and close to English in meaning.

/-mo/ ‘at’ /a be-mo beterapo/ ‘he house-at is’ ‘he is at (a) house’

/-paae/ ‘toward’ /a be-paae fulapo/ ‘he house-toward/to goes’ ‘he is going to a house’

Words in English expressed by prepositions are expressed in Folopa as nouns or verbs. Any type of preposition involving an action or origination (from) is expressed as a verb. (to go up, to go down, to put under, to go through). An English preposition indicating a direction or location is expressed in Folopa as a noun suffixed with either /-mo/ or /-paae/. English prepositions indicating an intention are expressed in Folopa with a verb suffix /-aai/. /a fes-aai walap/ ‘he intending to return is coming’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English preposition</th>
<th>Folopa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(put) in (the box)</td>
<td>Verb /bu-tapo/ ‘insert’ (an object)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in (location)</td>
<td>Verb /bu-rapo/ be in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under</td>
<td>Suffix /au-mo/ under-at (location word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over</td>
<td>Suffix /topo-mo munap/ top-at put</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at (location)          Suffix /be-mo/ house-at (location)
for (benefit)          Suffix /mena-ra-tapo/ ‘give-BEN-do’
for (as in ‘for one day’) Adv /beta suka-mo + verb/ ‘one day-(location)
with (accompaniment)  Suffix /whi-tamo/ ‘man-with’
with (agency)          Suffix /hama-ne dalepo/ ‘hammar-with hit’

B. Verb Phrase

1. Verbs

A verb consists of a verb root, which when occurring by itself, is bound, and the appropriate suffixation. The basic order of suffixes in a word functioning as a final verb is shown below in the chart.
(TV = transitional vowel, TR = transitive marker)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB ROOT</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>TR</th>
<th>TENSE</th>
<th>DECLARITIVE MOOD</th>
<th>IMPERITIVE MOOD</th>
<th>INTERROG MOOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present ‘do’</td>
<td>d-</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>-pο</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ae</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-present</td>
<td>y-</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘go’ (motion verb)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present</td>
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<td>u</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>pο</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>f-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pο</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far Past</td>
<td>f-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ę</td>
<td>pο</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>f-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aalo</td>
<td>pο</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f-</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>-ae</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘sit’ (stative verb)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>bet-</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>pο</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>bet-</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>pο</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far Past</td>
<td>bet-</td>
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<td>ę</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>bet-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aalo</td>
<td>pο</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bet-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-ae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘cook’ (transitive verb)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>bili-</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>pο</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>bili-</td>
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<td>pο</td>
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<td>Far Past</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future</td>
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<td>bili</td>
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<td>-ae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>bili</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>aalo</td>
<td></td>
<td>ε</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>bili</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>aai</td>
<td></td>
<td>ε</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Suffixes and The Fuzzy Line between Verb Morphology and Phonology

Verb suffixes are normally a combination of the basic root plus some form of the verb for ‘do’. In English, this word is used as an auxiliary verb (Denham & Lobeck 2010). In Folopa, it is part of the morphology. The first column shows the verb root. The second column shows any added transitional or epenthetic vowel. A verb root ending in a consonant requires that a vowel be added when the suffix begins with a consonant. The next column, TR, is the place where the form of ‘do’ is required when it is the main verb of the sentence. The forms for ‘do’ are /d-/ and /r-/, /-l-/ and /-y-/ and /-n/ when it is the nasalized alternate form for /-r/, the preceding vowel being a nasal vowel. Phonemically, they are also potential allophones of /d/.

It is in this environment that the phonemic and morphological properties collide. One way to express this is, when this set of sounds occurs in a noun or a verb root it is recognized as an allophone. When this set of sounds occurs in a suffix to a verb root, it is recognized as a morpheme for the word ‘do’.

The present tense free form is /d-/ = /dʌp/ ‘do’, and /t- = /tæp/ ‘build-do’ in present bound forms. This follows the phonemic pattern /d/ occurs only initially and /t/ occurs medially. Both the initial /d/ and medial allophone /t/ indicate the verb is transitive. Other root forms for ‘do’ are /l/, which occurs normally in verbs of motion, /-r-/ occurs normally with stative forms, and /-y-/ with non-present forms. I say normally because there are some irregular verbs which do not follow the pattern (/s-/ ‘to get’ uses /-r-/ and /n-/ ‘to eat’ use /-l/- which is normally for verbs of motion.)
This is complicated and beyond the scope of this paper so the simplest forms will be discussed. The point is that, before verbs can be serialized syntactically, the morphology must come into play.

Transitivity, or the affectedness of an object, is marked with /d/, /t/. When a verb is in the stative form with /-rapo/ it can become transitive by inserting an additional transitivity marker syllable as in /-ratapo/.

/wisi-rap/ [in the state of being good] ‘(it) is good’
/wisi-ratapo/ [good plus transitive marker] ‘(he/she) made (it) good/repaired (it).

3. Verb Phrase Structure

A verb phrase may have only one word—a verb with its suffixation. Verb roots are always bound when only one-word verbs are used.

a. A verb phrase may contain an adverb. The pattern is ADV + Verb.

/dua f-ae/ ‘carefully go-IMP’. /kaae tawae/ ‘similarly hold-IMP’ or ‘wait’
/do faalopo/ [tomorrow go-FUT] ‘will go tomorrow’
/meteli faaloe/ [when go-FUT-INT] ‘when will (you) go?’
/ti felepo/ [really go-PAST] ‘(he/she) is really/permanently gone’

b. Serial Verb Phrases

Folopa has two classes of serial verb phrases.

1) Noun plus Verb structure

The first type is the combination of a noun and a verb root to create a new meaning. The first member of the serial verb is a noun. The second member is a verb.

/dou nukulapo/ literally [index-finger eat] ‘is laughing’
/bope paketapo/ literally [chest enlarge] ‘is boasting’
/fopaae butapo/ literally [nose inside, or nose flaring] ‘is angry’

In this combination of noun plus verb, the noun is not considered a noun but the two words together are understood to be a verb.

2). Verb root plus verb structure

i. Serial actions—Present/Future VR + ene Go/Come + T/A/M

(Tense/aspect/mood)

/hupu s-ene fae/ [pig get-in-order-to go-IMP] ‘(you) go get (the) pig’

/ni tik-ene warapo/ [tree cut-in-order-to come] ‘(he/she) is coming to cut (the) tree’

ii. Serial actions—Past/Present VR + olo Go/Come + T/A/M

/hupu s-olo walepo/ [pig get-completed action coming] ‘having gotten the pig, (he/she) is coming’

This is the same ending as described above for the Same Subject clause marker.

iii. Serial action simultaneous VR + \ Main Verb

A note of interest is that the verb for ‘join’ is /oloke-tapo/. I am glossing the /o/ morpheme here as ‘join’ as I am assuming a semantic connection between the verb and some suffix forms.

/sok-o walapo/ [extract-join come] ‘arrive’

/tuk-o holae/ [cut-join go up IMP] ‘get up’

/bet-o mulapo/ [be-join put] ‘is put’ or ‘is placed’

c. Second member verbs

The second member verbs are a small set of common verbs, with "go" being the most common. Second member verb class includes the following.
/f-/ ‘go’ /daa-/ ‘stand’ /n-/ ‘eat’ /d-/ ‘do’

/w-/ ‘come’ /bet-/ ‘sit’ /s-/ ‘get’

/ho-/ ‘go up’ /mu-/ ‘lie’ /ta-/ ‘hold’

/ko-/ ‘go with’ /er-/ ‘be’ /di-/ ‘hit/kill’

III. Conclusion

Folopa is a complicated language despite being the language of a people who are considered lacking in development and education. The language has evolved over hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. Its presence in the Southern Highlands and Gulf Provinces remains somewhat of a mystery as it is not related closely to any of the languages in the larger region. Studying this language over many years has been an exciting adventure.

Works Cited


Appendix B

Folopa Morphology

Folopa language makes extensive use of suffixation. There are no prefixes. The categories of words that can take suffixes are NOUNS, PRONOUNS, VERBS, DEICTICS.

Nouns

Nouns are free morphemes and may take a variety of suffixes. They represent different levels of syntax. Word level, clause level, sentence level and discourse.

Word level suffixes

Plural: A noun may have a suffix indicating plural. /-rape/


Accompaniment: A noun may have a suffix indicating that a person is being accompanied by ‘someone. An English equivalent is ‘with’. /-tamo/

/whi-tamo/ ‘with the man’ /Naane whitamo felepo/ ‘The boy went with the man.’

Location/direction: A noun may have a suffix indicating location or direction. These endings work with deictics as well. /-mo/ Location, /-paae/ Direction

/be-mo/ ‘at the house’ /whi bemo beterapo/ ‘The man is at the house.’

house-at man house-at be-PRES

/be-paae/ ‘toward the house’ /whi bepaae felepo/ ‘The man went to the house.’

house-toward man house-toward go-PAST

/u-paae/ ‘toward there’ /u-mo/ ‘over there’ /i-mo/ ‘here’

Conjunctions: A noun may have a suffix indicating a conjunction between two nouns. /-kele/

Conjunctions between clauses are handled in a different way.
/whi naale-kele f-elepo/ ‘The man and the boy went.’
man boy- and go-PAST-IND

The suffix for the English word ‘or’ as a conjunction is /-ro/

/whi naale-ro f-ele-e/ ‘Did the man or the boy go?’
man boy-or go-PAST-Question

Exclusion: A noun may have a suffix indicating a specific person /-toroti/

/whi-toroti felepo/ ‘That (specific) the man went.’
man-SPEC go-PAST-IND

Another suffix that is close in meaning is /-maate/ ‘alone’

/whi-maate felepo/ ‘The man went alone.’
man-alone go-PAST-IND

Kinship: A noun for a human being may have a suffix indicating kinship to the speaker or subject of the speech. /-ma/

/so-ma felepo/ ‘(My) wife went.’
woman-kin go-PAST-IND

It is assumed that the speaker is referring to his own wife unless another in indicated.

Sentence level

Agency: A noun that is the subject of a sentence may have a suffix indicating that he/she is the agent of the action of a transitive verb. /-ne/

/whi-ne/ ‘man-AGENT’ /whi-ne yuwi d-ale-po/ ‘The man hit the dog.’
man-AG man-AG dog hit-PAST-IND

Discourse level

Topic marker: A noun may have a suffix indicating that the object or person is the topic of the discourse. /-ta/
/kale whi-ta felepo./ ‘The man went’
   the man-TP go-PAST-IND

This mean the aforementioned man is the main topic of the conversation.

**Multiple suffixes on nouns**: A noun may have several of the above-mentioned suffixes at one time. They are ordered as follows

/whi-rape-kele-toroti-ta/ ‘(someone else) and the men only (topic) (followed by verb)’
   man-PL-and- only - TP

/kale whi so-ma-tamo- felepo/ ‘The man went with his wife.’
   the man woman-kin-with go-PAST-IND

**Pronouns**

Pronouns may have suffixes that are the same as nouns with the exception of PLURAL.

The number of people indicated by a pronoun is reflected in the form of pronoun used.

**Verbs**

The following chart shows three kinds of verbs in Folopa: verbs of motion, static or stative verbs, and transitive verbs.
As can be seen above, the choice of morpheme for the three types is different.

VI indicates a vowel has been inserted to maintain the syllable pattern. The vowel is usually a copy of the previous vowel in the root or corresponds to a mood as in /fulapo/ where the /u/ indicates duration of the action.

**Tense:** Folopa verbs use suffixes to indicate tense. The tenses are future, present, recent past, unobserved past, and far past.

Future: -aalo /w-aalo-po/ ‘will come’ /biliy-aalo-po/ ‘will cook’

Present: -a /wa-l-a-po/ ‘comes’ /bili-t-a-po/ ‘cooks’

Recent past: /w-ale-po/ ‘came’ /bili-y-alepo/ ‘cooked’

Unobserved past: /w-ĩ-po/ ‘came’ /bili-ĩ-po/ ‘cooked’

Far Past: /w-ipakale-po/ /bili-pakale-po/

**Mode:** Folopa has suffixation to indicate indicative, interrogative, and imperative mode. There are also a number of endings that indicate degrees of certainty, negative, and intention. Not all of these will be covered in this paper.
Indicative normally is indicated by the suffix /-po/ at the end of the verb and the end of an independent clause.


Interrogative is indicated by the addition of a suffix /é/ at the end of the verb or question word. This symbol represents the open-mid front unrounded vowel [é].

/meteli-é/ when-INT   /f-ele-é/ go-PAST-INT ‘(has he/she) gone?’

Imperative is indicated by the addition of a suffix /-ae/ on the verb root. There are a few exceptions on irregular verbs.

/s-i-r-a-po/ get-VI-do-PRES-IND   /s-ae/ get-IMP ‘get!’
/bili-t-a-po/ cook-do-PRES-IND   /bili-y-ae/ cook-do-IMP ‘cook!’
/f-ele-po/ go-PAST-IND   /f-ae/ go-IMP ‘go!’

Transitive, benefactive

An intransitive verb (it doesn’t normally take an object) may become transitive by changing the form of ‘do’ suffix. Note the change from the static form /-r-/ to the transitive form /-t-/

/bu-r-a-po/ ‘is inside’  /bu-t-a-po/ ‘put inside’

If a verb is already transitive, changing the ‘do’ form or adding an additional ‘do’ form creates a benefactive verb.

/mena-t-a-po/ give-do-PRES-IND  (he) gives

/mena-ra-t-a-po/ give-be-do-PRES-IND  ‘(he) gives to (someone)’

Nominalization (creating an adjective and a noun from a verb root)
A verb root may add a suffix to change word categories from a verb to an adjective or noun.

/bili-tapo/ ‘cook’ (verb)

/bili-tere ola/ ‘cook-ADJ thing’ Adding /-tere/ creates an adjective form.

/bili-tere-tei/ ‘cook-ADJ-NOM Adding /-tei/ onto the adjective form creates a noun.

Adverbial (creating an adverb type of word using a verb root)

Folopa builds serial verb phrases from verb roots plus suffixation. Verb root + /-ro/

/s-o-ro betterapo/ get-VI-Serial verb ending + verb ‘gotten, it is’ or ‘

/bete-ro betterapo/ be-SV + be ‘having existence, (he/she) is present’ or ‘he is really here’

Tight serial phrases

A tighter serial verb is constructed from a verb root plus /-o/ plus an inflected verb.

/bet - o mu-n-a-po/ is - (serial connection) put-do-PRES-IND ‘(an item) has been put’

Negative Indicative

To make a verb negative the infix /-ni/ is added to a verb stem.

/whi bete-r-a-po/ ‘the man is (here)’

/whi bete-ni-po/ ‘the man is not here’

/whi f-ele-po/ ‘the man went’

/whi f-ele-ni-po/ ‘the man did not go’

Negative Imperative

To issue a negative command the suffix /-aose/ is added to the verb stem.
Polite Request

To make a polite request the suffix /-aasepe/ is added to the verb stem.

/mena-t-a-po/ ‘(he/she) gives’ /mena-ae/ ‘Give!’ /mena-a/ ‘please give’

/f-u-l-a-po/ ‘(he/she) goes’ /f-ae/ ‘Go!’ /f-a/ ‘please go’

There are a number of other suffixes that indicate mood that are not mentioned in this paper.

Dependent and independent clause endings

Folopa builds sentences from independent and dependent clauses. When the subject of both clauses is the same the verb ending used is /-olo/ at the end of the dependent clause.

When the subject of the two clauses is different the verb ending at the end of the dependent clause is /-tepa/.

[dependent clause ends in verb + /-olo/ or /-tepa/]

[ independent clause is last and ends with indicative, question, or command ending.]

/be te - tepa, whi felepo/
house build-Different Sub, man go-PAST-IND
‘The house having been built, the man went.’

/be te - yolo, whi felepo/
house build-SameS man go-PAST-IND
‘After he built the house, the man left’

By using a different ending on the dependent clause, a different subject is indicated.

Simultaneous
To indicate that the actions of an independent and a dependent clause are simultaneous the suffix /-uraalu/ is added to the verb stem. The dependent clause always comes before the dependent clause.

Kale wei mo ti hut - **uraalu**, dowasi hasi topo fea bosenalepo.
the water very truly go up-while big mountain top all covered

‘While the water was going up, the big mountains were covered.’
Curriculum Vitae for

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Education
09/64 to 06/65 Seattle Pacific College, Seattle, WA

01/66 to 06/66 Spokane Community College, Spokane, WA

06/70 to 08/71 University of Washington, Seattle, WA
  • Two semesters in Applied Linguistics

06/88 to 06/90 Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA

06/89 to 06/90 Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA
  • B.A. in General Studies

06/95 to 06/99 Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA
  • MA Degree in Leadership Studies

01/08 to 04/08 Trinity Western University
  • Two graduate level courses in Literacy

09/14 to 01/15 Grand Canyon University
  • Doctoral program in Leadership – Two courses completed

09/15 to present – Eastern Washington University
  • Graduate courses in Teaching English as Second Language
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2009 to present  Moody Bible Institute, Spokane, WA

Instructor

▪ Taught Introduction to Language/Phonetics
▪ Taught Strategic Planning and Research
▪ Taught Second Language Acquisition
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2009 to 2011  Spokane Community College, Spokane, WA

▪ Taught Voice Articulation – a course for non-English speakers to reduce foreign accent

2007 to 2009 Trinity Western University, Langley, B.C. Canada

Administration

▪ Assisted the Director of the Canada Institute of Linguistics with students advising, record keeping.

Instructor

▪ Co-taught course on Language and Culture Acquisition
▪ Assisted in teaching courses in Literacy

1970 to 2007 Summer Institute of Linguistics, USA, Papua New Guinea

Linguist

▪ Research, analysis, writing of linguistic papers

Literacy

▪ Created materials for the language literacy program

Administration

▪ Served two years as Personal Director for the SIL PNG Branch
▪ Served over a period of 7 years on the Executive Committee board of directors in various positions.

Accomplishments

Author


**Service Award**
- Received the Logohu Medal for service to the country of Papua New Guinea in 2005.

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Gardening, quilting, writing