

Language Inclusion,
FWCC Asia West Pacific
September 2024

The Need: The English language has remained the *lingua franca* of the Section since its inception, and will probably continue to do so at least through the next decades. Since FWCC AWPS Asia West Pacific Secretary Richard Meredith highlighted the need to recognise language inclusion as an important step in strengthening Friends' fellowship in Asia West Pacific, the question has been how it can be achieved with such limited resources. However, innovations in Friends Peace Teams Asia West Pacific over the last several years using new technologies have alerted FWCC AWPS that new practices may be possible. The technologies are not as good as we'd like them to be, but this project is seeking to identify and pilot practices which can journey with what is currently available, and make strong language inclusion a feature of the program.

Steps so far

October 2023 Section Gathering:

At our FWCC AWPS Section Gathering in Hong Kong the issue of language inclusion was raised, and it became clear that indeed, this was an issue for many Friends whose first language was not English. First, presenters were asked to speak slower, simpler, and to avoid idiom. Rather than being a burden on others, this was an opportunity for us to be more Quakerly! Secondly, language was raised as a topic in conversational groups, and it began to be a source of interest and acknowledgement. Thirdly, we introduced a new practice: over the course of the Gathering, each language group had an opportunity to present a mini-language class with a few greetings in their own language, possibly some Friends' terms, and offer an activity such as a song. *Cebuano* (the language of Visayas in The Philippines), *Tagalog* (the national Filipino language), *Korean*, *Japanese*, and *Hindi/Nepalese* presented activities, and a brief appearance was made in *Cantonese* (the Hong Kong variant of Chinese). The distinction between Cebuano and Tagalog emphasised the importance of language, not nationality. There was strong positive feedback about the experience. Mini-language sessions encouraged participants to actively engage, even if their general understanding of English was passive rather than active. Through the few days the event became recognised as an opportunity for play and fun, which lifted the atmosphere. Our language classes signalled that Friends recognised Asia West Pacific Section was a place of diversity, where everyone belonged equally at the table. The practice is likely to be an intrinsic part of future Section Gatherings.

Exploring Key Texts for translation

March 2024 Meeting with Section of Americas

As the result of a fundraising project targeting US philanthropy practices, FWCC Section of the Americas have a well-endowed project on language inclusion, which FWCC AWPS is working with. The first step was a meeting in March, as the project leaders were establishing themselves. Section of Americas (SOA) has expressed a

willingness for FWCC AWPS to source materials and opportunities from this project. For example, once a bilingual glossary of Friends' terms is researched and made available online, SOA has offered to work with us to use the engine for Asian languages. Because they were the project leaders suggested we wait until after the World Plenary in August 2024 for us to work together on a range of possibilities.

August 2024 World Plenary, Johannesburg and Online

The World Plenary offered language interpretation for English, Spanish (serving mostly Central and South American Friends) and Kiswahili (for East Africa). Business was largely conducted in English. FWCC Asia West Pacific used the programmed worship part of its Plenary Worship spot to share Quaker and one or two Biblical quotes in languages from across Asia West Pacific, including *Maori*. English translations were offered on the large screens at the venue, and online. The consensus was this was a powerful offering, spiritually, and some commented on the quality of the unprogrammed worship sharing that followed. Speaking in several languages highlighted the unique Asia West Pacific identity in ways that had not been formerly recognised.

This worship experience had a transforming effect on Section Friends attending, which was strengthened by the three Section Committee sessions we were allotted. Language inclusion was also recognised as important to our fellowship in the future, so much so that it was decided to pioneer some language inclusion practices at our Section Gathering online later this year. This came from the Section participants themselves, and will take us to the next level.

Adrian Glamorgan also took the opportunity to do a video interview of one of the language interpreters so she could share the best ways for speakers to help language interpreters do their work. This will be made available online.

August 2024 Contribution to Bantayan Cultural Project

This part of the project is a case study in language inclusion practices. Language inclusion has a focus on maintaining cultural diversity in even small population of speakers. Raissa Avery Marfa from Friends Peace Teams Asia West Pacific has a leading to help preserve culture on Bantayan Island (population 145,000) culture and Bantayanon, the local language with its unique blend of vocabulary that draws from distinct features of Cebu, Negros, Bohol, Masbate and Leyte and Samar. Raissa plays a key role in FPT AWPS establishing peace libraries, and is especially interested in producing children's leading material in her local language. FWCC AWPS Secretary Adrian Glamorgan offered a "train the trainer" experience to Raissa and two other people working with her, mentoring in songwriting. (Adrian used to teach Creative Writing at Curtin University). The songwriting method can be used to generate cultural knowledge in local language, and to shift consciousness from language preservation to language revival and contemporality. It also highlights the importance of working with existing forms. (The model is similar to the Celtic Revival in Ireland, of popular music being sung in Irish). This workshop encouraged Raissa reaching out to cultural producers in Bantayan (like Kerdas Bantayan) to become more knowledgeable about local dance and song forms, traditional musical instruments, and draw them into her peace libraries centre being established on Bantayan. Future mentoring workshops are envisaged.

This part of the project has been an opportunity for FWCC AWPS to “give back” to Friends Peace Teams Asia West Pacific as they have helped mentor the Secretary also.

August 2024 Meeting with Kins Aparece Friends Peace Teams Asia Coordinator

Kins Aparece and Adrian Glamorgan met to discuss the actual mechanics of running an online Section Gathering, using a combination of making a modest financial contribution to a few language interpreters, and enlisting volunteers. FPT connections means we can reach such people, who are not currently apparent within FWCC AWPS as a Section.

September 2024 Quaker South Asia Study Group

During his visit to Delhi in July 2024, Adrian met with Archana Gour, Secretary for the small Friends meeting known as General Conference of Friends in India, about a process to write a new bilingual South Asia Advices and Queries in Hindi (as part of a broader Advices & Queries for our Section) through a Quaker South Asia Study Group process. We have met once, in September 2024, online, and it seems it will be best to see how this can be done when Adrian attends the All India Meeting in early October.

Friends Glossary

Such glossaries that currently exist of Friends’ terms (such as discernment, speaking truth to power, travelling in the ministry etc) seem to be literal or even just homophone translations from the English language which do little to help deepen understanding and insight from local languages. Creating a language glossary is an opportunity for a social process that engages

Coming Up

- Connecting with the new Executive Secretary of Section of Americas, Evan Welkin, and the language inclusion group, post-World Plenary
- Travelling in the Ministry to India, to identify current Hindi-English language engagement, explore the bilingual South Asia Advices & Queries
- Working with FPT AWP to implement innovations in language inclusion for the Section Gathering late November 2024
- Friends in the Section and Yearly Meetings have been periodically invited to identify a limited number of Quaker texts that can be translated from or into English, using Quaker writers, but with limited responses. Section of Americas will be asked their experience and advice on this also.
- Recommendations to Section Committee about the best strategy for language interpretation and priorities for translation

Expenditures

Language inclusion can be an expensive process – if done the conventional way, hiring professional interpreters and translators. When we use these services, we want to target it to maximise long term results. Our preference is a sustainable strategy that will avoid giving a “sugar hit” to language inclusion in our region but leave no lasting change in practice. Thus this first stage has not had substantial costs, limited to the Executive Secretary’s expenses and time. However, we envisage this to change in the coming year, particularly as we work towards Section Gathering in October 2025, as we develop

social processes for glossaries, identify key texts, and develop and implement interpretation and translation practices in such a way that they are likely to be continued. The online presence that is being planned by Section of Americas is an expense beyond anything that this project could afford, on its own, but by contributing to it at the right moment for an Asia-West Pacific language presence, we hope to achieve a much bigger effect than

Conclusion

Rather than being seen as a marginal concern, language inclusion in Asia West Pacific is emerging as a key identity marker for the Section, which celebrates diversity, encourages curiosity, and provides a direct path with which to explore the Quaker experience to non-English speakers across our region. The existence of the Section of Americas project is an unexpected boon, which we trust will bear fruit. Language inclusion brings relevancy to a part of the world far removed from its origins in England and Pennsylvania, and an immediacy for those who may have no English, or only to a passive level. In turn, we hope to enrich the wider fellowship of Friends with the perspectives unique to our region.