

# **A SKETCH OF MOTA GRAMMAR**

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A sketch of Mota grammar by R. H. Codrington

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**R. H. CODRINGTON**

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MOTA GRAMMAR.

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## A SKETCH OF MOTA GRAMMAR.

### I. ALPHABET.

THE letters are used on the principle of representing the sound of the Mota by the letter which represents not the same, but the corresponding sound in English. The power of the letters in the two languages is very rarely identical, but in most cases the difference is slight. The following are the most important differences:—

1. *g* is in no case the same as in English, but represents a consonant common to all Melanesian tongues.
2. *g* represents a compound consonant in which *k p w* are present, with varying prominence in various words.
3. *ŋ* represents the English *ng* in *singer*, not that in *finger*. Because the Mota *g* is not the English *g* the sound of *ng* in Mota (as in *tangae*, a tree) is altogether different to the English *ng*, in either of its two sounds. In writing, or in printing in italics, this sound is represented by *ñ*; in printing in ordinary type by an italic *n*.

The letters used are *a e g i k l m n o p q r s t u v w*.

Before *r*, after *n* and *l*, there is an euphonic sound of *d*; as *nan ra* sounds *nandra*; and *pul rua*, *puldrua*; but the *d* is not written, as the words are *nan* and *ra*, *pul* and *rua*, and it is only a way of pronouncing *r* to please the ear. *m* is often pronounced very broadly, as if *mw*.

The vowel sounds represented by *a e i o u* are perhaps ten; *a e i o* having a long or short sound, *u* only a long

one, as English *oo*, and *o* a third, peculiar, approaching *u*.

The only true diphthongs are *ai*, *ae*, *ao*, *au*.

The proper vowel sounds are represented by the vowel letters, not the English sounds. *w* is commonly used to close a syllable; *u* at the end of a word often is very faintly pronounced.

(For notes on the Dialects more appropriate here see page 31.)

## II. ARTICLES.

The Mota Articles are three—*o*, *na*, *i*.

1. 2. *O* is the more common, *na* being used only when the noun has a pronominal affix: *o ima*, 'a or the house;' *naimak*, 'my house.'

There is no distinction of definite and indefinite, but both articles are, as regards the mind of the native, probably definite.

There is no distinction of number: *o ima*, 'a house;' *o ima nani*, 'houses.'

3. *i* is a Personal Article, used with Personal Nouns, as *na* and *o* with common nouns; *o* being used with names of places.

*i* is used with all names, native or foreign: *i Sarawia*, *i Palmer*. It is also used with the interrogative 'who?' *isei?* It has also the power, not only of showing a word to be the name of a person, not of a thing, but of personifying the notion conveyed by a noun or a verb.

This power of the personal article with a verb produces something resembling a participle: *gale*, 'to deceive;' *i gale*, 'the deceiver;' but this is only used when something like a title or special appellation is in view.

(Caution.—In the translation of St. John this is often wrong.)

This power of *i* with a noun is simple, conveying what



a capital letter does in English: *i Vat*, 'the Rock'; *i Vavae*, 'the Word'; *i Nun*, 'the True One.'

It is probably a consequence of native names having always a significance with them, that, whether interrogatively or demonstratively, the personal article used with the word for 'thing' means a person. Thus, *gene*, 'a thing'; *o gene iloke*, 'this thing'; *i gene iloke*, 'this person.' *O sava?* 'what?' *I sava?* 'who?' The feminine is *iro*. *Ro* is prefixed to native female names, not to foreign ones, and can be used without *i* as well as with; but *i* is the article, *ro* not.

The presence of *ro* shows the word to have become a native feminine name; as in ordinary personal names, and, as above, in personification; and shows, in the same way, a female to be spoken of or inquired about: *iro gale*, 'the female deceiver'; *iro gene*, 'the woman'; *iro sava?* 'what woman?'

*Ro* is not used with foreign names, because they have no signification: *i Sara*, *i Mary*, *i Ono*. *I* and *iro* are used with names also of animals. The plural is *ira*, masculine; *ira ro*, feminine; but the articles of these is *i*.

### III. NOUNS.

*Nouns Substantive*, i. e. the names of things, are divided in Mota (as in Fiji), into two classes, viz., those that do and do not take the pronominal affix, with the article *na*. This division is almost exhaustive; there are but very few words with which, according to strict native usage, the two forms of the possessive can be used.

(*Caution*.—In our translations, till of late, errors are common.)

The principle of this division appears to be a nearer or more remote connection between the possessor or the possessed. Parts of a body, or of an organization, the ordinary equipment and properties of a man, things in which proprietorship seems most nearly involved—these

take the pronominal affix. Other nouns, a more distant notion of relation to which exists, are incapable of this affix. This appears to be the principle; but the application of it in particular is in some cases unintelligible, e.g. 'a man's bag,' is *na tania na*; 'his basket,' *non o gete*; 'his bow' is *na us una*; 'his paddle,' *non o wose*.

This distinction is common to all Melanesian languages.

A second division of nouns is according to termination:—

1. Some have a termination marking a substantive in what may be called its nominative case, *i. e.* as it stands unaffected by connection with another word.

2. Others have no such termination.

These two classes of substantives again approach the division before mentioned, those (1) which have a special termination, being generally names of things which are relative to some other things; those (2) which have not, being generally the names of things which have an absolute existence of their own. It will consequently be mostly the case that nouns which can also be used as verbs belong to the first class; the names of things as such not bearing use as verbs.

Of the second class, nouns with no special termination, it is unnecessary to say anything.

The first class may be divided according to the termination affixed to the radical word:—

a. If the radical ends in a vowel, *i* is affixed, and sometimes *s*; e.g. *sasa-i*, 'a name;' *vava-s*, 'a word;' *tuqe-i* 'a garden;' *rora-i*, 'a report.'

b. If the radical ends in a consonant the termination *iu* or *ui* (according to dialect) is affixed; e.g. *tol-iu*, 'an egg;' *gat-ui*, 'head;' *qeteg-iu*, 'beginning.'

This termination, as above stated, is an addition to the radical word; and it drops when, in what corresponds to the inflection of a possessive case, the pronoun is affixed, thus *na-sasa-k*, 'my name;' *na-tuqs-ma*, 'your garden.' It also drops in composition with another word; as, *tol toa*, 'a fowl's egg;' *o gat qos*, 'a pig's head.'

## INFLECTION.

It will have been seen that there is something of inflection in what may be called the possessive case of the noun (though the word inflected represents the thing possessed, not the possessor); but this is indeed but the rejection of termination, and not the modification of the true noun: *i.e.* in *gat goe*, 'a pig's head,' *gat* is the true form of the word, which is lengthened into *gatusi*, when it stands absolute, by the special substantival termination *si*.

There is besides a further and truer inflection undergone by words whose radical ends in the vowel *a*, which in what has been called the possessive case becomes *s*. Thus *sasax*, 'a name,' standing absolute, and with the termination; *na-sasa-k*, 'my name,' the radical with the pronominal affix; but *o sasn tanun*, 'a man's name,' with the radical inflected in the possessive case.

It is, however, probably much better not to speak of a possessive case, but to regard the word as in composition, in which the first member of the compound very naturally takes a lighter termination.

But it should be observed that when the two substantives thus form a compound word, it represents what in English would be expressed by the possessive case. When in an adjective, *i.e.* where it qualifies the noun, there is no compound form, there is no inflection in Mota: thus *o ime goe*, 'a pig's house,' with the notion of a pig whose house it is; but *o ima goe*, 'a pig house,' as distinct from a man's habitation. *O sinaga vusi*, 'a spirit's food,' *o sinaga vusi*, 'spiritual food.'

(*Caution.*—There are some errors in this matter in our translations.)

This inflection obtains in words whose radicals end in *a*, whether they take a substantival termination or not. *Nausi*, 'a leaf,' is inflected *no*; *no tangae*, 'a tree's leaf,' an example of a small class. It is desirable perhaps here