

7.4.5.7. MISSIONARY LINGUE FRANCHE: MOTU¹

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7.4.5.7.1. INTRODUCTION

Motu, an Austronesian language, is spoken as a first language by about 15,000 people in 12 coastal villages in the Port Moresby area.² From Manumanu in the west to Kapakapa in the east it is about 70 miles.

Before the first European settlers arrived the Motu area was already an important centre for trade. The Motu went on trading expeditions called hiri to the Gulf of Papua as far as the Purari Delta, and people from the Gulf came to the Motu area. Trading was also carried on with people to the east. Turner (1877-78:471), who was one of the first missionaries, noted that Hanuabada, the main Motu village in what is now the city of Port Moresby, was visited by people from many different tribes and that the Motu were respected by the neighbouring tribes. Indeed, through these trading contacts a pidgin form of Motu grew up, which later developed into the lingua franca which was first known as Police Motu and is now called Hiri Motu.³ It is likely that some Koitabu (Koitapu) people actually spoke Motu as a second language, as some of their villages were on the coast between Motu ones and Koitabu (Koitapu) groups were living in some Motu villages.

7.4.5.7.2. ADOPTION OF MOTU AS A MISSIONARY LINGUA FRANCA

It was into this situation that the London Missionary Society missionaries came. A group landed at Manumanu in 1872 and then in 1874 Dr W.G. Lawes set up a station at Hanuabada. He immediately started to learn

Motu and to translate Christian literature. In 1877 the first book was printed, called *Bukana Kunana: Levaleva Tuahia Adipaia* (Lawes 1877), containing reading lessons, some Bible translation and Bible stories, and hymns.

Faced with many small vernaculars, and having to weigh up the need to communicate effectively against the limits to manpower and finance, London Missionary Society policy in Papua was to work in whatever was the major vernacular of the area of the local mission station. So Motu became the language of the mission work, not only in Motu villages but also in villages of the surrounding area.

Polynesian pastor-teachers were soon settled in the coastal villages, at first among the Motu and then among other tribes. At the widest extent Motu was used in the London Missionary Society schools to the west among the speakers of Gabadi, Nara (or Pokau) and Roro;⁴ inland among the Koitabu (Koitapu) and some Koiari villages; and to the east among the speakers of Sinaugoro, Humene, Kwale, Doromu, and Maria. The general pattern was for village schools to provide a few years of education and then for the brighter students to go on to the boarding schools at the mission stations for a further three years. This brought these students into closer contact with the mission lingua franca for their area. As Papuans were trained as pastor-teachers, they gradually took over from the Polynesians in the village schools, but the pattern remained the same. Up to World War II this was the only school system for the area, apart from some Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist schools, as the government did not run schools for Papuans until after the war.

Some missionaries felt that it was best if children could be taught to read and write in their own language first and then to learn Motu. Lister-Turner wanted to introduce Roro into schools in that area and this was carried out in the 1940s by Chatterton. Primers were produced in both Roro and Gabadi (London Missionary Society 1946, 1950). But the people themselves came to view Motu as the language of education and the church. When the first missionaries arrived at the Roro village of Delena, they found a group of Motu-speakers there, but in time they too became a Roro-speaking group (Chatterton 1969). However, the Roro people who were followers of the London Missionary Society did not accept a translation of the four gospels into Roro prepared by Chatterton (British and Foreign Bible Society 1947) as they felt that for church they should use Motu. Mrs Rankin introduced the teaching of Sinaugoro literacy into Saroa area schools, but some parents were not in favour of this move, wanting their children to be educated in

Motu and English. However, Sinaugoro remained in the schools until the mid-1950s when Mrs Rankin left Saroa. The place of Motu was not greatly affected as the vernaculars were used only in the early years for teaching literacy. More significant was the increasing emphasis on English. Even before World War II, the government was urging that more English be taught and made it a condition for receiving government grants for schools. The stage was reached where Motu was used only in the first couple of years of schooling. Then in 1955 the Administration changed its policy and wanted only English to be taught in schools, so Motu was phased out.

7.4.5.7.3. THEOLOGICAL TRAINING IN MOTU

Theological training was for many years in Motu for students from all along the southern Papuan coast. Lawes began a training centre for pastor-teachers in Port Moresby and instruction was all in Motu, though some English was taught. In 1894 the training centre was moved to Vatorata, inland from Kapakapa. The language situation remained much the same. There was some disagreement over the years among the missionaries as to whether training should be in Motu or English. Lawes was very much in favour of Motu and his view prevailed. In 1924 there was another move, this time to Fife Bay in the Suau area, where the Lawes College was set up. At first candidates had to do their entrance examinations in Motu. Then the number of candidates from outside the Central District grew and as they mostly could not speak Motu, though they could speak Hiri Motu, a change was made so that candidates could answer questions in any language but the missionary in the area had to translate the answers into English or Motu. For a time there was an entrance examination testing the knowledge of Motu and it even became necessary to teach Motu in the first year of the four-year course. English was used more and more, though for some subjects Motu remained the medium of instruction. In the last few years up to its closure in 1968, the college provided only pastor training. Teachers were trained in English at Ruatoka College near Kwikila in the Central District. Now pastors are trained at the United Church seminary at Rarongo near Rabaul with English as the medium of instruction, and teachers are trained, also in English, at nearby Gaulim Teachers College.⁵ In 1958 Chalmers College was set up at Veiru near Kikori in the Gulf District, to cater for older students whose English was inadequate for entry into Lawes College. Motu was the language of instruction. Chalmers College was moved to Fife Bay after Lawes College closed, but in 1970 Chalmers College itself was closed. Thus Motu was used by the London Missionary

Society in the training of all its pastors and nearly all its teachers in Papua for about 80 years.

7.4.5.7.4. PASTORAL WORK AND LITERATURE IN MOTU

When pastors were stationed in the language areas where Motu was used in schools, and in some other nearby areas such as Hula or Doura, they would use Motu in church work if they did not know the vernacular. And they often did not know it, as for many years Motu and Hula men made up the majority of Papuan pastors. The missionaries, both European and Polynesian, also worked in this way. The only Bible translation available in most cases was that in Motu.⁶ Most circuit meetings (also called district meetings) were held in Motu.

In the 1950s a body called the Papuan Church Assembly consisting of Papuans was set up to advise the governing body of the whole mission in Papua, which consisted of missionaries. Motu was the language of the Assembly meetings. When the indigenous church, the Papua Ekalesia, was set up in 1962, its assembly meetings were also held in Motu.

There are two main dialects of Motu, Western and Eastern, although dialect variation is slight. The London Missionary Society chose to use the Western dialect as spoken at Hanuabada. This has become the standard form and many people from other Motu villages use it at least for talking with people from outside their own village.

Church literature now includes the Bible (Bible Society in Papua New Guinea 1973), a hymn book (London Missionary Society 1948), a translation of *Pilgrim's Progress* (London Missionary Society 1951a), orders of various services, handbooks for pastors, and similar material. For a few years during the 1950s there was a monthly church paper called *Harina*.

7.4.5.7.5. CONCLUSIONS

The choice of Motu served the London Missionary Society fairly well. With its position and prestige it was most probably the best vernacular to choose in that part of the present Central Province coast. One might ask why greater use was not made of English, at least as the church language for the Papuan coast as a whole. First there was a practical problem in that the great majority of early missionaries were Polynesians and not many of them knew English well, so it would have been hard to introduce English into all schools. Second, there was a considerable feeling against using a foreign language. Lawes in particular was strongly in favour of using a language which belonged to the people and their culture. However, one may well wonder why the pidgin form of Motu

was not chosen. It seems that in the early years of the mission it was not considered as a separate language, but just as a simple form of Motu. The early missionaries, both Polynesian and European, were in fact taught the pidgin form by the Motu people. The Motu did so as this was their language for use with outsiders. Lawes' first Bible translations show many features of pidgin Motu, but gradually they change and later ones are mostly Motu. Also, the missionaries were not to know that Hiri Motu would later be used so widely by the government and spread as far as it has. When Hiri Motu was recognised as a language in its own right, most Motu-speaking missionaries opposed using it in place of Motu. It was considered inadequate for teaching and religious purposes, rather in the same way as Pidgin English has been, and prior to World War II no printed literature appeared in Hiri Motu.

The only other group to use Motu as a lingua franca has been the Jehovah's Witnesses.⁷ They used it in various places along the Papuan coast and produced some literature in it including a periodical called *Gima Kohorona* (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York 1958-66). However, they found that Motu was not understood well enough outside the area adjacent to the Motu area, and so in 1966-67 they changed over to Hiri Motu for their publications. Their missionaries have also learnt a number of vernaculars and they have published material in some, e.g. Hula, Toaripi, and Kiwai.

7.4.5.7.6. FUTURE OUTLOOK

There remains the question as to how much Motu will continue to be used as a lingua franca. In 1962 a survey by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Brett, Brown, Brown and Foreman 1962) found quite a number of speakers of Motu as a lingua franca in the area around that of the Motu tribe. Just how many there are now is hard to say, but it is probably in the region of 10-12,000. This is not a large number, but it includes the great majority of the educated and influential people in this area. In addition, a few thousand more can understand Motu, although they would not claim to be able to speak it.

Some decline in the use of Motu can be expected. The greatest factor is that the present education system uses only English. Motu is no longer taught in schools, nor does the United Church use it in its training of pastors. Younger people in the area appear more likely to learn the main lingue franche - English, Hiri Motu, and Pidgin - but not other vernaculars, as their way of life and pattern of social contacts differs from that of former days.⁸ While the use of vernaculars

may well be encouraged in schools again, one cannot say whether people like the Gabadi or Sinaugoro will choose Motu instead of their own vernacular. There is already greater use of English and Hiri Motu in the Papuan coastal area of the United Church than before. Hiri Motu is the official language for synod meetings of the Papuan Mainland Region of the United Church which stretches from the Irian Jaya border in the west to Alotau in the east. Nevertheless, leadership in the five United Church circuits where Motu has been used as a lingua franca is still very much in favour of Motu. These circuits are Delena, Redscar, Port Moresby, Kadeboro, and Saroa. In fact, all except the Delena circuit contain Motu villages. These circuits are very prominent in the United Church and many leaders are drawn from them.

N O T E S

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2. This counts the Hanuabada complex as one village.
3. It is common for people in Papua New Guinea to refer to Hiri Motu as 'Motu'. However, in this discussion the name 'Motu' is used only for the vernacular language of the Motu people.
4. The Roman Catholic mission has used the vernaculars in the Kairuku Sub-district (now District) since their work began in 1885, and has published a variety of material in most of them, including Roro.
5. The United Church of Papua, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands was formed in 1969 by the union of the Papua Ekalesia (which was the indigenous church which grew out of the work of the London Missionary Society), the Methodist Overseas Mission, and the United Church of Port Moresby.
6. The only other language in the area referred to which received much attention was Hula. It was used in the schools from the start of mission work there, which was only about a year after work began at Hanuabada. Early work was in the Keapara dialect, but later the Hula

dialect was used. See, for example, British and Foreign Bible Society 1892, 1954.

7. The Seventh Day Adventist Church has used Hiri Motu in its work. However, before World War II people used only Motu in printed material. So the Seventh Day Adventists published a hymn book containing English and Motu hymns (Papuan Mission of the Seventh Day Adventists 1938). Subsequent hymn books have continued to use Motu.

8. A survey by the author of language knowledge and use in one Motu village, Tubusereia, revealed such a pattern. Inquiries in other areas indicate that the pattern is fairly general.

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