



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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BISLAMA INFORMATIONAL REPORT

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Where is Bislama Spoken?

- Bislama is widely spoken in Vanuatu, which is an independent republic located in the southwest Pacific, between Fiji and Australia, with a population of about 170,000.



Bislama Language Facts

- With more than 100 local languages in Vanuatu, along with English and French, Bislama (Pidgin English) is used as a vital communication tool. It allows the 40% who were educated in French to talk to the 60% who were educated in English.
- There are about 6,200 native speakers of Bislama, and 200,000 people who speak it as a second language.
- The language exists with only 2500 words (English and French each have more than 35,000 words).

Bislama is a Dialect of:

- Melanesian Pidgin

Some other dialects of Melanesian Pidgin are:

- *Tok Pisin*, spoken in Papua New Guinea
- *Pijin*, spoken in the Solomon Islands

- Only in Vanuatu is the language of Bislama declared by the constitution to be the national language.

Vocabulary:

- The major lexifier for Bislama is English, with words such as **brij** for ‘bridge’ and **buluk** for ‘cow’ (from bullock).
- Some of the words of English origin in Bislama are archaic, for example: **masket** for ‘rifle’ (from “musket”).
- Some words are stylistically restricted, for example: **puskat** for ‘cat’ (from “pussy cat”).
- Other words of English origin have meanings which are modeled more on what is found in local Oceanic languages, such as **han**, which means both ‘hand’ and ‘arm’, while **leg** means both ‘foot’ and ‘leg’.
- However, there are a number of common words of French origin in Bislama as well, such as **kabine**, ‘toilet’ (from cabinet) and **pima**, ‘chili’ (from “piment”).

Bislama alphabet and pronunciation

A a	ae	B b	E e	F f	H h	I i	J j	K k	L l	M m
a		bi	e	ef	ets	i	je	ke	el	em
[a]	[aɛ]	[b]	[e]	[f]	[h]	[i]	[ʝ]	[k]	[l]	[m]
N n	NG ng	O o	P p	R r	S s	T t	U u	V v	W w	Y y
en	eng	o	pi	ar	es	ti	u	vi	we	ye
[n]	[ŋ]	[o]	[p]	[r]	[s]	[t]	[u]	[v]	[w]	[j]

Sample text in Bislama:

Evri man mo woman i bon fri mo ikwol long respek mo ol raet.

Translation:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CftjckSDoFY&Feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wVHk48HiP8&feature=related>

PHONOLOGY: CONSONANTS

- The consonants we find in most people's Bislama are: **p, t, k, b, d, g, m, n, ng, f, v, s, h, l, r, y, w**, also the sound we write as 'ch' is written as **j**.
- They lack certain fricatives which occur in English, like 'th' 'sh'.
- There is often no contrast between **p** and **b**, **t** and **d**, **k** and **g**, **f** and **v**, and **s** and **z**.
- The majority allow open syllables only, and very few allow final syllables to be closed by more than one consonant. Because of this they have frequent omission of past tense when speaking English.

For example, they would say:

This office is close from 12:00 to 1:00.

They should have lock the door.

I am very concern about the problem.

PHONOLOGY: VOWELS

- There are only 5 vowels in Bislama: **i e a o u**
- Other vowels in English are generally adapted to the nearest equivalent vowel in Bislama, so a word like 'burn' in English is pronounced as **bon**.
- For many Bislama speakers English can be difficult because contrast between long and short vowels is not made.

For example: It is difficult for Ni-Vanuatu to distinguish the difference between the 'a' in "apple" vs. the 'a' in "ape".

Semantics:

- When you want to say that something (or somebody) is something else, there is no verb meaning “be” in Bislama, and the words describing the two things are placed one after the other, as in:
Mi tija. ‘I am a teacher.’
Yu hanggre. ‘You are hungry.’
- When the first part of the sentence is a noun or a pronoun other than **mi** or **yu**, the second part of the sentence will be separated from the first part by the small word **i**, as in:
Tomson i hanggre. ‘Thompson is hungry.’
Mifala i bos. ‘We are the bosses.’
- Because of these rules in the language, it can be difficult for the people of Vanuatu to learn and remember that there must be the verb “to be” connecting certain nouns to other words.
- They also have to learn how and when to conjugate the verb “to be” which can be difficult to master when you are not used to doing this.

Intonation

- Nobody has really tried seriously to study the intonation pattern of Bislama, but it certainly seems to have a unique melody involving an unusual rise and fall of the voice while speaking.
- There seems to be a distinct intonation in Bislama when compared to other Melanesian Pidgins.

Common mistakes in Bislama language:

- **Use of non-count nouns as count nouns:**
 - ‘We need more *furnitures* in this office.’
 - ‘She had to go and have *a surgery*.’
- **Singular noun following ‘one of’:**
 - ‘One of my *friend* will bring it.’
 - ‘Vanuatu is one of the nicest *country* I have been to.’
- **Pronominal copy after an overt subject noun phrase:**
 - ‘John *he* was sick yesterday.’
 - ‘The boys *they* were playing football.’
- **Been as a pre-verbal past tense marker:**
 - ‘I *been* study all week.’
 - ‘He *been* swear at me.’

BISLAMA COMMUNICATION STYLES

- The people of Vanuatu are very friendly, and the last thing they want to do is offend or upset you. However, this can sometimes hinder communication a bit.
- If you need help finding something or getting information, you should ask an open-ended question.

For example: let's say that I wanted to find the market, but I wasn't sure if I was going the right way. Instead of asking a "yes" or "no" question like, *"Is this the way to the market?"* I would say, *"How do I get to the market?"*

If you ask a "yes" or "no" question, you will get a "yes" answer nine times out of ten, even if that's not the real answer. This is because the Vanuatu people are afraid to disagree with you because they feel that they might offend you.

- Ni-Vanuatu people are very polite. They are forever thanking each other and greeting each other, even when they drive down the road the wave at each other and beep to say hello!

"Tankyu Tumas" means thanks very much and they are forever saying it.

RESOURCES

Books

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