SAY IT IN MOTU

an instant
introduction to the
common language of papua
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Introduction

There are two kinds of Motu.

There is the Motu which is the mother tongue of the people of the Motu villages, strung out along the Papuan coast to the east and west of Port Moresby.

Then there is Hiri Motu, a simpler form of the language. This was the trade language of the people of the south Papuan coast before the coming of the white man. In particular it was the language of the Hiri, the great trading expedition which the Motu people mounted annually and on which they traded earthenware pots for sago with the people of the villages fringing the Papuan Gulf.

In the 1890s it became the lingua franca of Sir William MacGregor's police force, and was for many years known as "Police Motu" on that account. Today it is widely used as a lingua franca throughout the length and breadth of Papua, though not in New Guinea which has its own lingua franca, Pidgin.

Hiri Motu is the common tongue of the streets and markets of Port Moresby, and an acquaintance with it, however slight, will add to the interest of a visit to that city.

Pronunciation

The consonants:

bdghklmnprstvw

Pronounce these as in English. G is always as in go, never as in George.

The vowels:

Pronounce

a as in father

e as in ten

i as in marine

u as in rude

o is a bit more difficult, somewhere between the sound of o in not and the sound of ou in nought. Scots will have no trouble with this sound, but English and Australian speakers will find it a bit difficult at first.

Double vowels:

Pronounce
au and ao as ow in cow
ai and ae as in high
oi and oe as oy in boy
ou as in though

ei as in weigh

For other double vowels — pronounce each vowel separately.

Actually there is a very slight difference between the sounds of *au* and *ao*, likewise between those of *ai* and *ae* and *oi* and *oe*. But it can be ignored for the purposes of this book.

Stress;

Papuans speak Motu very smoothly and evenly, with no strong stress on any one syllable. Listen to them and try to imitate them.

Greetings

GREETING ONE PERSON:

Oi namo? Io. lau namo. Are you well? Yes, I'm alright.

GREETING MORE THAN ONE PERSON:

Umui namo?

Are you well?

Io, ai namo.

Yes, we're alright.

These are the traditional Motu greetings. But there is a growing tendency among young Papuans to use literal translations of the customary English greetings.

"Good day", "Good morning", "Good afternoon" and

"Good evening". In their Motu dress these are

Dina namona!

Good day!

Daba namona! Adorahi namona! Good morning!
Good afternoon!

Hanuahoi namona!

Good evening!

TO BID SOMEONE GOOD-BYE, SAY

Ba mahuta!

This is the equivalent of English "Sleep well!", but is used in the daytime as well as at night.

Some useful single words

Io means "yes".

Sometimes you will hear an

alternative word — Oibe.

Lasi means "no".

Sedira means "Perhaps",

"I'm not sure".

With the appropriate intonation it can mean "I couldn't care less".

Momokani means "That's for sure".

Dohore means "Wait a bit",

"Bye and bye".

Vadaeni means "Stop", "That'll do",

"That's enough".

Please and Thank You

Please is Mani or Mani emu kara in Motu. But most Papuans have taken over our English word and say Pilisi.

There is no Motu word which specifically means thankyou. A Papuan would probably say *Namo* (Good) or *Namo* herea (Very good). But again our English word has been taken over in the form *Tanikiu*.

Asking questions

Daika? Who? Dahaka? What?

Who's That? Unai be daika? (Literally, That is

Who?)

What's This? Inai be dahaka? (Literally, This is

what?)

What's the name of this? Inai gau ena ladana be

dahaka?

(This thing its name is

what)

Now watch it!

What's that boy's name? Unai mero ena ladana be

DAIKA?

(That boy his name is WHO?)

Daika ena? Whose?

Whose pig is this? Inai be daika ena boroma?

(This is whose pig?)

Hida? How many? How much?

How many are there

altogether? Ibounai hida?

(All-of-them how-many?)

How much for this fish? Inai gwarume ena davana hida?

(This fish its price how-

much?)

Edena? Which?

Edena negai? When? Edena Bamona? How?

Which do you want? Oi ura edena? (You want which?)

or

Edena oi ura? (Which you want?)

When did he come? Edena negai ia mai? (Which time he come?)

How shall I do it? Edena bamona lau karaia?

(Which like I do-it?)

Edeseni ai? Where?

Where is the dancing going on?

Mavaru gabuna be edeseni

ai?

(Dance place is where?)

Badina dahaka? Why?

Why hasn't he come? Badina dahaka ia mai lasi?

(Reason what he come not?)

Who are "We"?

Here are the personal pronouns in Motu:

lau I

oi you (singular)

umui you (plural)

ia he, she or it

idia they

So far so good. But when we come to "we" it's harder going. In Motu, as in many Pacific languages, there are two words for "we", and their meanings are different.

Let us take an incident to make matters clear.

Two Papuans (we will call them A and B) find that they have nothing to eat. A says to B, "We have nothing to eat. Let's go to C and ask him to give us some food". So they go to C. A says to C, "We have nothing to eat. Please give us some food".

When A said to B, "We have nothing to eat" he meant "You and I have nothing to eat". The Motu word for "we", here is ita. It is called the inclusive "we", because it includes the person spoken to.

When A said to C, "We have nothing to eat" he meant "B and I have nothing to eat". The Motu word used for "we" here is ai. It is called the exclusive "we", because it excludes the person spoken to.

ita we (inclusive)
ai we (exclusive)

"Ours" or "Ours"?

Here are the possessives in Motu:-

egu	my	lau-egu	mine
emu	your (singular)	oi-emu	yours (singular)
emui	your (plural)	umui-emui	yours (plural)
ena	his, her, its	iena	his, hers, its
edia	their	idia-edia	theirs
Inai be egu boroma		This is my	pig
Inai boroma be lau-egu		This pig is	mine

But once again we have two forms for "our" — inclusive and exclusive.

Exclusive:	emai	our	ai-emai ours
Inclusive:	eda	our	iseda ours
Inai be eda	takisi;	ita lao.	This is our taxi; let's go.
Inai be emo	ii takis	i, oi siri.	This is OUR taxi; you get
			lost

Numbers

ta	one
rua	two
toi	three
hani	four
ima	five

The Motu number system goes all the way up to 100,000, but is little used nowadays, perhaps because some of the number names are pretty polysyllabic. For instance, 99 is taurahanita ahui taurahanita! Papuans are familiar with the English numbers, and use them in preference to their own. But the five given above may be useful to you.

One or Many

In Motu most nouns have the same form irrespective of whether they are singular or plural. Thus vaivai may mean one mango or many mangoes. Some other word must be used to show which is meant.

A mango Vaivai ta (Mango one)

A lot of mangoes Vaivai momo (Mango many)

Bona and Bena

"Bona" means "and". "Bena" means "then". Use these words exactly as you would their English counterparts.

Gimme!

Give me that fish

There are several ways of saying this in Motu. The best way requires more understanding of Motu grammar than I can give you in this book. A simple way which can be used is

Unai gwarume oi henia lau dekenai

(That fish you give-it me to)

Put a Pilisi on the front for politeness, of course!

Word order

You can't just string words together in Motu in the same order as you would in English.

Occasionally the order is the same, as in:—

I know vou

Lau diba oi

I want fish

Lau ura gwarume

but this doesn't often happen.

In Motu, adjectives of quantity and quality come after the noun, not in front of it:-

Five pigs

Boroma ima (Pigs five)

A big fish

Gwarume badana ta (Fish big

one)

Very good bananas

Biku namo herea (Bananas good

very)

Prepositions also come after the noun, not in front of it:— I am going to the village Lau lao hanua dekenai

I go village to

Put it in the basket

Bosea lalonai oi atoa

Basket in you put-it

My father is behind the

house

Egu tamana be ruma murinai

My father is house behind

But demonstratives and possessives come in front of the noun, as in English:-

That man My house Unai tau

Egu ruma

Sentence shape

In English the shape of the sentence is usually Subject — verb — object

In Motu it is generally

Subject — object — verb

but it may even be Object — subject — verb

The object-subject-verb order is used especially when the subject is a pronoun: —

I bought this basket Inai bosea lau hoia

This basket I bought-it

When the subject is a noun the order is generally (though not always) subject-object-verb: —

That boy killed a pig Unai mero boroma ta ia alaia

That boy pig one he killed-it

But as the object-subject-verb order is always a possibility, and as ia can mean either "he" or "it", this sentence is ambiguous. It could mean "A pig killed this boy".

To get over this difficulty we use a "subject marker" to make clear which is the subject of the sentence.

In Motu, the subject marker is ese, and it immediately follows the subject. So: —

Unai mero ese boroma ta ia alaia That boy (s.m.) pig one he killed-it

but: —

Unai mero boroma ta ese ia alaia That boy pig one (s.m.) it killed-him.

Now go right ahead and say it in Motu!

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English — Motu vocabulary

above ataiai broken makohi afternoon adorahi brother tadina. all ibounai kakana. also danu taihuna another ma ta (see Motu -English answer haere arm imana section) arrive ginidae burn doua ascend daekau bush uda henanadaia buy ask hoia

back doruna bad dika call boiria, boiboi bag puse canoe vanagi, biku banana lakatoi basket bosea carefully namonamo beach kone carry huaia beat chair helai gauna kwadia begin hamatamaia chest kemena bell gaba chief lohia below henuai church dubu betel nut buatau clean goevagoeva bada clock big dina gauna bite koria cloth, clothes dabua black korema cloud ori blue vaiuri coconut niu blood rarana cold keru, keruma body tau-anina come mai bone turia cook nadua borrow abitorehai cotton varo bottle kavabu cough hua bov mero duahia count box таца crooked gageva break hamakohia crv taitai bring mailaia cut utua, ivaia

dance fish mavaru gwarume darkness dibura fish-hook kimai day dina fishing net reke die five mase ima different idau floor reirei dirty miro fly (verb) roho ditch dadaira. fly (noun) lao koupa food aniani do foot karaia aena dog sisia forget laloa bojo door iduara four hani down diho, henuai friend turana drink inua fruit huahua drop hamorua full honu drv kaukau dust kahu, gahu garden uma ikoukou gate abia get girl kekeni each ta ta taiana give henia ear eat ania go lao edge isena good namo grandchild tubuna egg gatoi dokona grandparent tubuna end matana rei eye grass gadokagreen gadoka face vairana vara, tubu grow fall keto, moru ground tano father tamana guide hakaua fear gari fence magu, ara fight heatu hair huina fill hahonua happy moale find davaria hard auka finger kwakihat kwara gauna kwakina inai henia hate finish haorea he ia finished ore head kwarna fire lahi

hear

kamonai

heavy	metau	leave	
	durua	(behind)	rakatania
her	ena	lie down	hekure
here	inai, iniseniai	lie (untrue)	koikoi
hers	iena	lift (up)	abia isi
hide	hunia	light	
hill	ororo	(not dark)	diari
his	ena, iena	light	
hole	matu	(not heavy)	haraga
hole		live	noho, mauri
(in ground)	guri	long	lata
hold	dogoa tao	look	itaia
hot	siahu	look after	naria
house	ruma	look for	tahua
how?	edena	lose	haboioa
	bamona?	lost	boio
how many?	hida?	love	lalokau,
hunt	labana		ura henia
I	lau		
iron	auri	mainland	tanobada
island	motumotu	make	karaia
		man	tau
		many	momo
journey	laolao	marry	headava
jump	roho	mast	au tubua
		master	biaguna
		meat	vamu
kill	alaia	meet	hedavari
		mid-day	dina tubua
		milk	rata
laugh	kiri	mine	lauegu
law	taravatu	month	hua
lazy	lahedo	moon	hua
lead		morning	daba
(show way)		mosquito	namo
leaf	au rauna	mother	sinana
leg	aena	mouth	uduna
letter	revareva	my	egu

nail	ikoko	quick	haraga-
name	ladana		haraga
neck	aiona		1
new	matamata	rain	medu
night	hanuaboi	rat .	bita
noise		read	duahia
(people)	helogohelogo	real	momokani,
noise (things)		_	korikori
	regerege	red	kakakaka
nose	udu	relative	varavarana
	baubauna	right	•
now	harihari	(not wrong)	maoro
		right	
	_	(not left)	idiba
old (people)	buruka	ring (bell)	toua
old (things)	gunana	river	sinavai
one	ta, tamona	roof	guhi
only	sibona	room	daiutu
open	kehoa	root	ramuna
our	_	rope	kwanau
(inclusive)	eda	run	heau
our	_		
(exclusive)	emai	_	
ours		sad	lalohisihisi
(inclusive)	iseda	sail	
ours		(of canoe)	lara, palai
(exclusive)	ai-emai	salt	damena
owner	biaguna	salt water	tadi
		same	hegeregere
		say	gwau, hereva
pain	hisihisi	scissors	pakosi
parents	tama sina	sea	davara
path	dala	see	itaia
people	taunimanima		hoia
pig	boroma	shame	hemarai
place	gabuna	share	haria
play	gadara	she	ia
pole	au, aivara	shoes	tamaka
pot	uro	shoot	pidia

short	kwadogi	sugar cane	tohu
shout	lolo	sweep	daroa
shut	koua	sweet potato	kaema
sick	gorere	swim	nahu
sing	ane abia		
sister see		table	pata
"brother"		take	abia
sit	helai	take away	laohaia
skin	kopina	talk	hereva-
skirt	rami		hereva
sky	guba	taste	mamina
sleep	mahuta	teach	hadibaia
slow	metaira-	tear	
	metaira	(paper, etc.)	darea
small	maragi	tell	hamaoroa
smell	bonana	that	unai
smoke	kwalahu	their	edia
snake	gaigai	theirs	idia-edia
soft	manoka-	there	unai,
	manoka		unuseniai
some	haida	these	inai
song	ane	they	idia
speak	hereva	thick	uduna
stand	gini	thin	severa-
_			severa
stand up	toreisi	thing	gau
star	hisiu	think	laloa
stay	noho	this	inai
steal	henaoa	those	unai
steps		three	toi
(building)	vadavada	throw	tahoa
stick	au	throw away	negea
stomach	bogana	time	nega
stone	nadi	tobacco	kuku
stop	doko,	today	hari dina
	hadokoa	toe	ae kwaki-
story	sivarai		kwakina
straight	maoromaoro		kerukeru
strike	botaia	tongue	malana
strong	goada	tooth	isena

torn	hedare		
touch	daua toho	weak	manoka
tree		weeds	ava
	au	well	namo, goeva
trousers	piribou	well (water)	guri
true	momokani	wet	paripari
try	karaia toho	what?	dahaka?
turn	giroa	when?	edena negai?
twine	varo	where?	edeseniai?
two	rua	which?	edena?
		white	kurokuro
untrue	koikoi	who?	daika?
up	dae, ataiai	whole	ibounai,
use (verb)	gaukaralaia		idoinai
		whose?	daika ena?
		wind	lai
verandah	dehe	woman	hahine
very	herea	write	torea
village	hanua	wrong	kerere
		why?	badina
wallaby	magani	•	dahaka?
wait	naria		
wake	noga		
waken	haoa,	yam	maho, taitu
	hanogaia	year	lagani
walk	raka	vellow	labora-labora
wall	haba	yesterday	varani
want	ura	you	
wash	huria	(singular)	oi
watch	naria,	you (plural)	umui
	gimaia	vour	arria.
water	ranu	(singular)	ети
waves	hurehure	your (plural)	emui
we	···a···c···a···c	yours	oniai
(inclusive)	ita	(singular)	oiemu
we		vours	ownu
(exclusive)	ai	(plural)	umui-emui
(CACIUSIVE)	uı	(Piulai)	umui-emui

Motu-English vocabulary

abia	get, take	bogana	stomach
abia isi	lift, pick up	boiboi, boiria	call
abitorehai	borrow	boio	lost
adorahi	afternoon	bonana	smell
ae kwaki-		boroma	pig
kwakina	toe	bosea	basket
aena	leg, foot	botaia	hit, strike
ai	we, us	buatau	betel nut
	(exclusive)		
ai emai	ours	daba	morning
	(exclusive)	dabua	cloth, clothes
aiona	neck	dadaira	ditch
alai a	kill	dae	up
ane	song	daekau	go up, ascend
ane abia	sing	dahaka?	what?
ania	eat	daika?	who?
aniani	food	daika ena?	whose?
ara	fence	daiutu	room
ataiai	above, up		(of house)
atoa	put	dala	road, path,
au	tree, stick		track
	pole	damena	salt
auka	hard	danu	also
au rakuruku	firewood	darea	tear
au rauna	leaf		(paper, etc.)
au tubua	mast	daroa	sweep
auri	iron	daua toho	touch
ava	weeds	davara	sea
		davaria	find
bada	big	dehe	verandah
badina		diari	light
dahaka?	why?		(not dark)
biagu n a	master,	dibura	dark,
-	owner		darkness
biku	banana	diho	down
bita	rat	dika	bad

dina	sun, day	gatoi	egg
dina gauna	clock, watch		thing
dina tubua	midday	gaukaralaia	use (verb)
dogoa tao	hold	gimaia	watch, guard
doko	stop	gini	stand
dokona	end	ginidae	arrive
doruna	back	giroa	
aorana	(of body)	giroa mai	turn return
doua	burn	goada	
duahia	read, count	goudu	strong,
dubu	church	goanagoana	strength
durua	help	goevagoeva	clean sick
auraa	петр	gorere guba	
eda	011M	0	sky
euu	our	guhi	roof old
edena?	(inclusive) which?	gunana	
edena: edena	how?	guri	hole
	now?		(in ground)
bamona?	b 2		well
edena negai?			(of water)
edeseniai?	where?	gwarume	fish
edia	their	gwau	say
egu	my	gwauraia	tell, declare
emai	our		••
	(exclusive)	haba	wall
emu	your	haboioa	lose
	(singular)	hadibaia	teach
emui	your (plural)	hadokoa	stop, cause
ena	his, her, its	_	to stop
•		haere	answer
gaba	bell, drum	hagaria	frighten
gabuna	place (noun)		woman
gadara	play	hahonua	fill
gadoka-	green	haida	some
gadoka		hakaua	lead (verb)
gageva-	crooked	hamakohia	break
gageva		hamaoroa	tell
gahu	dust	hamatama-	
gai ga i	snake	taia	begin
gari	fear	hamorua	drop

haui	four	hoia	hur coll
hani		honu	buy, sell full
hanua	village		
hanuaboi	night	hua	moon, month
haoa	waken	hua	cough
ha-orea	finish	huahua	fruit
haraga	light	huaia	carry
	(not heavy),	huina	hair
	quick	hunia	hide
haraga-		hurehure	waves
haraga	quick	huria	wash
haria	share, divide		
hari dina	today	ia	he, she, him,
harihari	now		her, it
harihari		ibou n ai	all
gauna	gift	idau,	
headava	marry	idau-idau	different
heatu	fight	idia	they, them
heau	run, speed	idia edia	theirs
hedare	torn	idiba	right
hedavari	meet		(not left)
hegeregere	same, equal	idoinai	whole
hekure	lie-down	iduara	door
helai	sit	iena	his, hers, its
helai gauna	chair	ikoko	nail
helogo-	noise	Ikoukou	gate
helogo	(people)	ima	five
hemarai	shame	imana	hand, arm
henanadai	ask, question	inai	this, these,
henaoa	steal		here
henia	give	inai henia	hate
henuai	below, down	iniseniai	here
henunai	underneath	inua	drink
herea	verv	iseda	ours
hereva	speak, say		(inclusive)
hereva-	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	isena	tooth, edge
hereva	conversation	ita	we, us
hida?	how many?		(inclusive)
hisihisi	pain	itaia	see, look
hisiu	star	ivaia	cut

kae ma	sweet potato	labana	hunt
kahu	ashes, dust	labora-	
kakakaka	red	labora	yellow
kakana	elder brother	rladana	name
	or sister	lagani	year
	(same sex)		ľazy
kamonai	hear, listen	lahi	fire
karaia	do, make	lai	wind
karaia toho	try	lakatoi	multi-hulled
kaukau	dry		canoe
kav abu	bottle	laloa	think,
kehoa	open		consider
kekeni	girl	laloa boio	forget
kemena	chest	laloa tao	remember
	(human)	lalo-hisihisi	sad
kerere	wrong	lalokau	love, beloved
keru, keruma	cold	lao	go
kerukeru	tomorrow	lao	fly (noun)
keto	fall	laohaia	take away
ki m ai	fish hook	laolao	journey
kiri	laugh	lara	sail
koi koi	untrue,	lata	long
	deceitful	lau	I, me
kone	beach, shore	lauegu	mine
kopina	skin	lohia	chief.
korema	black		headman
ko ria	bite	lolo	shout
ko rikori	real, true		
kou a	shut		
ko upa	ditch	ma ta	another
kuku	tobacco	magani	wallaby
ku roku ro	white	magu	fence, wall
kwadia	hit, beat	maho	yam
kwadogi	short	mahuta	sleep
kwaki-		mai	come
kwaki n a	finger	mailaia	bring
kwalahu	smoke	makohi	broken
kwanau	rope	malana	tongue
kwara gauna		mamina	taste
kwarana		manoka	soft, weak
			,

maoro	right (not wrong)	noga	wake stay, live
maoromaoro	_	itoito	stay, five
maragi	small	oi	you
maragi-	Sillaii	Oi.	(singular)
maragi	tiny	oiemu	vours
mase	die	otemu	(singular)
matamata	new	ore	finished
matana	eye, point	ori	cloud
matu	hole	ororo	hill, moun-
maua	box	01010	tain
mauri	life	pakosi	sciss(rs
	dance	palai	sail, tent
mavaru		•	•
medu	rain	paripari	wet
mero	boy	pata	table, shelf
metaira-		pidia	shoot
metaira	slow, slowly	piribou	shorts,
metau	heavy		trousers
miro	dirty	puse	bag
moale	glad, happy		
momo	many, much	raka	walk
momokani	true, certain	rakatania	leave
moru	fall (from		(behind)
	height)	rakuraku	firewood
motumotu	island	rami	grass skirt
		ramuna	root
nadi	stone, rock	ranu	water
nadua	cook, boil	rarana	blood
nahu	swim	rata	milk
namo	good, weli	rauna	leaf
namo	mosquito	regena,	
namonamo	carefully	regerege	noise, (things)
naria	wait,	rei	grass
	look after,	reirei	floor boards
	watch,	reke	fishing net
	take care of	revareva	letter, writing
nega, negana	time	roho	fly, jump
negea	throw away	rua	two
niu	coconut	ruma	house

severa-		torea	write
severa	thin	toreisi	stand up
sia hu	hot	toua	ring bell,
sibo na	only, alone		beat drum
sinana	mother	tubu	grow
sinavai	river	tubuna	grandparent,
sisia	dog		grandchild
siva rai	story	turana	friend
	·	turiana	bone
ta	one		30112
ta ta	each,	uda	bush, forest
	one by one	udu	outil, forest
tadi	salt water	baubauna	nose
tadina	younger	uduna	mouth
	brother or	uduna	thick
	sister	uma	garden
	(same sex)	umui	you (plural)
tahoa	throw	umui emui	yours (plural)
tahua	see, look for	unai	that, those,
taiana	ear		there
tai huna	brother or	unuseniai	there
	sister	ura	want
	(opposite	ura henia	love
	sex)	uro	cooking pot
taitai	cry	utua	cut
taitu	yam		
tamak a	shoes, sandals	vadavada	steps
ta mana	father		(of building)
tama si na	parents	vairana	face
tamona	only one	vairanai	in front of
ta n o	ground, land	vaiuri	blue
tano bada	mainland,	vamu	meat
	world	vanagi	outrigger
tarav atu	law,	· ·	canoe
	prohibition	vara	born, grow
tau	man	varani	yesterday
tuu- anina	body	varavarana	relative,
tauni manima	people		relation
tohu	sugar cane	varo	cotton,
toi	three		thread

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