

7.4.5.3. MISSIONARY LINGUE FRANCHE: YABÊM

G.L. Renck

7.4.5.3.1. INTRODUCTION

The Yabêm language was originally spoken by approximately 900 people in the coastal area between Kamlawa, a village north of Finschhafen and Kasaŋa, approximately 20 miles south of Finschhafen.

7.4.5.3.2. STRUCTURE OF YABÊM

Yabêm is an Austronesian language with fairly simple phonological and morphological features.

7.4.5.3.2.1. PHONOLOGY

The phonemes of Yabêm are the following:

7.4.5.3.2.1.1. Consonants

/p/	voiceless bilabial unaspirated stop
/t/	voiceless alveolar unaspirated stop
/k/	voiceless velar unaspirated stop
/b/	voiced bilabial stop
/d/	voiced alveolar stop
/g/	voiced velar stop
/ʔ/	voiceless glottal stop
/w/	voiced bilabial rounded fricative
/s/	voiceless alveolar grooved fricative
/m/	voiced bilabial nasal
/n/	voiced alveolar nasal
/ŋ/	voiced velar nasal
/l/	voiced alveolar lateral
/y/	voiced alveopalatal continuant

For the practical alphabet, the Lutheran missionaries have so far used p, t, k, b, d, g, w, s, m, n, ŋ, l. For the phoneme /y/, j has been in use. The glottal stop has been indicated by c, and in the traditional analysis, it has not been interpreted as a consonant, but rather as part of the preceding vowel. Actually, the number of vowels has been doubled by that interpretation.

7.4.5.3.2.1.2. Vowels

/i/	high close unrounded front vowel
/e/	mid close unrounded front vowel
/ɛ/	mid open unrounded front vowel
/a/	low open unrounded central vowel
/u/	high close rounded back vowel
/o/	mid close rounded back vowel
/ɔ/	low close rounded back vowel

In the practical alphabet, i, a, and u have been used for the respective phonemes, /e/ has been indicated by ê, /ɛ/ by e, /o/ by ô, and /ɔ/ by o.

7.4.5.3.2.1.3. Tone

Yabêm is a tonal language with two tonemes, high and low. Since the high tone is much more frequent than the low tone, the latter is usually indicated. In Yabêm textbooks, however, the indication of tones has usually been left off altogether, since the meaning of a word, and with it its tone, is easily determined by its context by Yabêm-speakers.

7.4.5.3.2.2. MORPHOLOGY

7.4.5.3.2.2.1. Nouns

The noun morphology is relatively simple. There are two classes of nouns. Class I comprises everything which belongs essentially to a person, i.e. parts of the body, and personal relatives. Those nouns always occur with a possessive suffix, i.e. cannot occur without it. Class II comprises all other nouns. Possession with them is expressed by the possessive pronouns. There are three pronouns each in singular, dual, and plural, the first persons dual and plural have inclusive and exclusive forms of the possessive pronoun. Suffixes with nouns may express absence, connection, size, emptiness, destination, etc.

7.4.5.3.2.2.2. Verbs

There are no tenses, but only two modes (aspects), real and unreal. The real mode, named *Realis*, describes real actions of present and past.

The unreal mode, named *Imaginativus* or *Idealis*, describes everything which is to happen in the future, and also thoughts, wishes, imaginations, possibilities, and conditional actions. Mode and subject of the verb are indicated by prefixes of which there are two sets: one having voiceless stops with verb stems carrying high tone, and one having voiced stops with verb stems carrying low tone.

There are five verb classes: Class I are the monosyllabical verb stems with high tone; Class II are the monosyllabical verb stems with low tone; Class III are the monosyllabical verb stems which actually carry the high tone, but since the singular forms of the real mode carry the low tone, the voiced subject prefix occurs with these forms; Class IV are all verb stems with two syllables, either high or low tone; Class V is a special class, having monosyllabic low-tone stems, but voiceless subject prefixes.

Emotional attitudes, such as certainty, surprise, urgency, exclusiveness, resignation, etc. can be expressed by a number of verb suffixes, or by adverbs.

7.4.5.3.2.2.3. Other Words

7.4.5.3.2.2.3.1. *Number Words*

There are five basic number words which may be repeated three times, counting fingers and toes, up to the final figure of 20.

7.4.5.3.2.2.3.2. *Pronouns*

There are nine personal pronouns altogether, and 11 possessive pronouns, since there are inclusive and exclusive forms in the first persons dual and plural. Yabêm has three demonstrative pronouns relating to the speaker, the addressed, and others.

7.4.5.3.2.2.3.3. *Adjectives*

There are not many basic adjectives, but quite a number of adjectives are derivations from nouns, with the prefix *na-* which originally is a kind of genitive marker.

7.4.5.3.2.3. SYNTAX

The usual word order in a clause is: Subject-Predicate-Object. Temporal clauses can be formed by using conjunctions, relative clauses with short forms of the demonstrative pronouns, final and causal clauses with the conjunction *gebe* 'because' or 'in order to', conditional clauses with the conjunction *embe* 'if'. The negation word is *atom*, and is always placed at the end of a clause.

There are many interjections to express emotions.

Questions are indicated by a special interrogation word *me* which can turn a whole clause into a question.

7.4.5.3.3. YABÊM AS A LINGUA FRANCA

7.4.5.3.3.1. HOW YABÊM BECAME A LINGUA FRANCA

In 1886, the first Lutheran missionaries J. Flierl and K. Tremel started mission work at Simbang, south of Finschhafen, right in the centre of the Yabêm language area. Yabêm was the first New Guinea language which the Lutheran missionaries had to deal with. There was a sort of dictionary or rather wordlist which had been compiled by the German physician Dr Schellong who was with the German 'Neu Guinea Kompagnie' at Finschhafen. That list helped in the beginning, but was full of errors. Missionaries K. Vetter, and, after his early death, H. Zahn, were the men who mainly worked on Yabêm language research, aided by the German linguist Dr Dempwolff, of Hamburg University. Already during the first decade of this century, the Yabêm congregations sent evangelists across the Huon Gulf to the Kela area near Salamaua (Malalo). The people there speak Bukawa, an Austronesian language related to Yabêm, but since Yabêm had become a school language already with a limited amount of literature, it was used for mission work amongst the Kela people. Afterwards it spread with the Lutheran mission work amongst all people in the Finschhafen-Lae-Morobe area who spoke Austronesian languages, so that finally it was decided that Yabêm should be the school and church lingua franca for all Austronesian-speaking people.

The non-Christians who were contacted by the mission workers were quite keen to adopt that language in order to have contact with the Christian congregations and the education, and especially to have access to the existing literature, meagre though it may have been at that time.

7.4.5.3.3.2. THE USE OF YABÊM AS A LINGUA FRANCA

Already in the early years some literature was produced, especially for school work which played an important role in mission work. Vetter

compiled a Reader, and translated a selection of Bible stories. By 1901 he had Acts translated, and by 1906 the first 18 chapters of the Gospel of Luke. Zahn continued the work of Vetter, and became the author of most literature for schools and congregations. He compiled a Yabêm dictionary with 13,000 entries, which was mimeographed (700 pages) in New Guinea in 1917 (60 copies were made). In 1925 the New Testament, translated by Zahn, appeared in print, and was printed in London. Shortly before World War II, Dr Dempwolff wrote a grammar which was printed in Germany. Of all other publications, the Hymnal should be mentioned, in which the Christian hymns, which had been composed, were compiled, and also a monthly newspaper which brought, besides congregational news, also general news to the people.

After Christian congregations were established, it was necessary to promote school work further, and also engage the Christians themselves in that work. For that purpose, a school for evangelists and teachers was established at Logaweng, Finschhafen, in 1907, but that school worked effectively only from 1913 on. The people trained there, started school work in the villages along the coast. With the expansion of school and mission work, the Yabêm language was also promoted. All school materials, and the teaching programmes for the teachers (syllabi) were in Yabêm. Four years of elementary school were enough to give the children a sound knowledge of the Yabêm language.

The expansion of Yabêm had one natural limit, namely the fact that further inland there are not too many Austronesian languages in the Lutheran mission area.

Already before World War II, Yabêm had therefore reached its limits, without having completely penetrated all areas within those limits.

All efforts to spread Yabêm further within those given limits were thwarted completely at the end of the 1950s by the legislation of the Australian Administration regarding school work. All lingue franche were banned from schools except in areas where those languages had been the mother tongue of the people originally. The aim was universal primary education in English, a goal which was never to be reached, as was foreseen by a lot of mission people then, and has been realised by everybody else in the years since then.

That legislation put Yabêm out of the village schools completely except in a few areas. In many cases, the schools had to be closed, because there was nothing which could be substituted for the Yabêm textbooks and syllabi. The law was a severe blow to the whole of the Church school system, and in most areas robbed the people of the only way of education available to them without giving them a substitute.

7.4.5.3.3.3. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The estimated number of people who have an active knowledge of Yabêm is nowadays given as 25,000. The number of people with a passive knowledge might be considerably higher. Yabêm is still being widely used in the services, i.e. for the liturgy and for preaching, in the Austro-nesian Lutheran congregations throughout the Finschhafen-Lae-Morobe area. The Old Testament is being translated into Yabêm. The language is still being used in the training programme for pastors and other church workers. It has almost vanished in the village schools where it has been replaced by Pidgin, but efforts are being made to introduce the teaching of Yabêm again, besides Pidgin, as a medium of instruction, also on village school level.

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