7.4.5.4. MISSIONARY LINGUE FRANCHE: BEL (GEDAGED)

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7.4.5.4.1. INTRODUCTION

It is only since about 1967 that the name Bel has been generally
applied to this language. Previously the language was called by the
name of the island in Madang Harbour on which the Lutheran Mission for
many years had its evangelistic station for the Madang coastal area;
that is, Gedaged, a name which has been given a number of variant spel-
lings.[1] Gedaged is only one of several offshore islands in the vicinity
of Madang which, together with the nearby mainland coastal strip, are
inhabited by the native speakers of this language. The three islands
on which Lutheran Mission has been particularly active are Gedaged and
Bilia (both in Madang Harbour) and Siar, which lies about five miles to
the north. There is only minor dialectal variation among these three
groups. Nevertheless, when the preparation of literature began in
earnest, a choice had to be made among variant forms, and since at that
time the mission's chief station for the area was on Gedaged Island, the
dialect spoken there was chosen as the standard dialect and gave its
name to the language.

The recent adoption of the name Bel appears to be a belated recog-
nition of the fact that substantially the same language is the native
tongue of a much wider group, including especially the Siar and Bilia
people. Bel seems to be a tribal name for the group, as Mager (1952:22)
indicates in his dictionary definition. Investigations by Z'graggen
(1971:97) point to the likelihood that for linguistic purposes the name
Bel is more properly applied to a family of languages (called 'Belan'
by Z'graggen), one of which may be called Gedaged. The response to
recent inquiries tends to support this view that the name 'Bel' expresses

a social unity among people whose speech is diverse enough to justify
a division into several languages. For this reason, and because pre-
vious linguistic publications have normally used some form of the name
'Gedaged', this name will be used in this chapter.

7.4.5.4.2. THE STRUCTURE OF GEDAGED

7.4.5.4.2.1. *INTRODUCTORY REMARKS*

Gedaged is an Austronesian language, classified by Capell (1969:156)
as a member of the Austronesian sub-group which shows strong non-
Austronesian influence, especially in the verb. This is supported by
Z'graggen (1971:96-7) and others.

7.4.5.4.2.2. *PHONOLOGY*

The phonology is relatively uncomplicated, having a five-vowel system
and no unusual consonants except the voiceless lateral spirant (like
the Welsh ll). This voiceless l regularly replaces the trilled apical
r found in cognates in related languages. (In the mission's orthography
the voiceless l is represented by z.) Gedaged has also the trilled r,
but only in a few loanwords and in a small store of native words, almost
all of which are clearly onomatopoeic representations of fluttering,
rattling, or trembling motion, usually with reduplication of the syllable
containing this phoneme; e.g. bara bara *'rustling'*, terere *'trembling,
vibrating'*. There is also a voiced l with wide distribution in the
vocabulary.

Word stress is relatively light, falling regularly on the ultima,
with secondary stress in longer words. The ultimate stress is not re-
stricted to the root, but on nouns it falls on the final syllable of
personal possessive suffixes, and on verbs it shifts to the final syl-
lable of personal object suffixes. Other suffixes, such as clause
markers on verbs and locative and instrumental suffixes on nouns, are
never stressed.

7.4.5.4.2.3. *GRAMMAR*

The grammar is also a relatively simple one. Nouns are of two
classes, according to the manner in which possession of them is indi-
cated. The one class, denoting body parts, personal relationships, and
a few other items which are thought of as bearing an intimate and in-
alienable relation to the person, are marked in typical Austronesian
fashion by inseparable personal possessive suffixes. All remaining

nouns fall into the second class and are unmarked by possessive suffixes.
The possessor of a noun of the second class is shown by a preceding pos-
sessive form of the personal pronoun, which may also be used before
nouns of the first class.

The personal pronoun has the inclusive/exclusive distinction in the
first person plural. This distinction is maintained not only in its
possessive forms as a suffix or a free morpheme qualifying nouns, but
also in subject-marking and object-marking verbal affixes. There is no
inflection for dual number.

Clause structure has the order Subject-Object-Verb.

The verb itself, while showing non-Austronesian influence, is in-
flectionally simple in comparison with neighbouring non-Austronesian
languages. Affixes are employed to mark both subject and object as to
person and number. The structural pattern of the verb (disregarding
all elements of time, mood, and aspect, which are in any case suffixed
to this pattern without recessive phonological effect) is as follows:

     Subject + Verb Root (+ Object)

Object-marking is obligatory for transitive verbs. The optional omission
indicated applies only to intransitives.

Inflectional indication of tense seems almost non-existent. Time is
usually expressed by preceding free morphemes ('temporal adverbs') or
other contextual elements. The unstressed suffixes which may be appen-
ded to the above nuclear pattern involve the element of time in only an
incidental or relative way. They appear rather to express a kind of
indivisible 'time-mood-aspect complex' in which time is perhaps the
least significant element. With this addition the above pattern becomes

     Subject + Verb Root (+ Object) (+ T-M-A)

With zero representation of the T-M-A marker the verb is aoristic and in
this form appears most commonly as the sentence-final verb in narration,
which naturally is in past time. The same form may, however, refer to
present time, and on occasion it may represent a brusque command, very
definitely referring to the present or immediate future.

One T-M-A marker does at first appear to represent the present tense
unequivocally, in either the progressive or customary aspect. It consists
of the repetition of the subject prefix plus -me, e.g. u-la-u-me *'you
(sing.)* are-going/go', di-bi-tag-di-me *'they are-repulsing/repulse me'*.
Nevertheless, this form seems basically aspectual, picturing an activity
as in progress or as customary, and it may also be freely used as a
'historical present' in the narration of events far in the past.

Even the handful of eight or so intransitive verbs which in the
'aorist' or nuclear form always change the final -a or -o of the root

to -e are not to be thought of as indicating tense by this vowel shift
as in European 'ablaut'. This is shown by the fact that the same change
also precedes the affixing of clause markers referring to hypothetical
or anticipated events which have not yet become fact, and are therefore
by our reckoning in future time. This irregular vowel shift, which
also appears in brusque prohibitions, seems rather to be associated
with the perfective aspect.

   The T-M-A markers seem best classified as distinguishing between
'realis', events that have actually occurred or are in the process of
occurring, and 'irrealis', events imagined, conceived, anticipated,
desired, requested, etc. There are two sets of suffixes corresponding
to these two categories, each set being subdivided into sentence-medial
and sentence-final subsets. The realis sentence-final subset contains
the form -lak, which marks an event as completed, and the form com-
pounded with -me as illustrated above, which describes an event as in
progress. The irrealis set likewise contains two sentence-final forms.
One, -ol, expresses a wide range of concepts, such as simple futurity,
intention, desire, request, even a rather firm command. The other, -pe,
is used in the apodosis of unreal conditions (but also sentence-medially
in the protasis!) or as the optative of an earnest wish or a polite
request.

   The two subsets marking sentence-medial forms are neatly co-ordinated,
as shown in the following table. In the first line the one-letter suf-
fixes are used on nuclei ending in a vowel. The form in brackets, which
may follow either a noun or a consonant, is the marker for unreal con-
ditions.

Realis	Irrealis	Marking
-g, -ge	-p, -pa (-pe)	Immediate succession
-meg	-map	Contemporaneity (*while*)
-tag	-tap	Dependent relation (*then*)
-lag	-lap	Duration

   For the foreign learner one of the more troublesome morphophonemic
features of an otherwise rather simple verb system is the reduction
and/or regressive assimilation of the vowel in the subject prefix, which
often occurs when the remainder of the verb in its nuclear form consists
of more than one syllable. Examples are dibol *they speak* / dematal
they sit, tagod *we* (incl.) *request* / togodoani *we request him*,
ŋaloŋ *I hear, know* / ŋufuni *I strike him*. The first syllable of a
verb root may itself undergo this process in the change from transitive

to intransitive, as in magu *'be resentful'* / muguni *'hate him'*. A
somewhat similar shift in vowel quality accompanies suffixation on
nouns, malag *'my eye'* / meladin *'their eyes'*, sometimes with compen-
satory shifts elsewhere, baleg *'my tongue'* / beladin *'their tongues'*.
The reduced vowel represented by e in dematal, meladin, and beladin is
centralised so as to become, or closely approach, the shwa.

The above sketch should suffice to bring out some of the chief
characteristics of the language.

7.5.4.5.3. THE QUESTION OF A CHURCH LINGUA FRANCA IN THE MADANG AREA

7.4.5.4.3.1. *THE PERIOD UNTIL WORLD WAR II*

When Lutheran mission work was begun in the Madang area in 1887 by
the Rhenish Mission Society of Barmen, Germany, the first efforts were
made in the Astrolabe Bay region. Work was started in the Bogadjim and
Bongu languages, both non-Austronesian. In 1889, with the establishment
of a station on Siar Island, a beginning was made in the Gedaged lan-
guage. Early estimates of the number of native speakers of Gedaged at
this time usually vary between 400 and 600. It was probably difficult
at the time to obtain an exact count, and these estimates may have in-
cluded only the villages of Gedaged, Siar, Bilia, and Riwo. The total
of those four groups would not have been much more than 600. For com-
parison, the recent count by Z'graggen (1971:97), which includes also
Sek and Malamal, shows 2,180 native speakers.

Each of the early missionaries naturally began to learn the language
of his area. Having little or no linguistic training, they nevertheless
commenced working out orthographies and grammars and compiling diction-
aries to the best of their ability. Many years passed before this work
could progress to the stage of preparing and printing simple Bible
stories, catechisms, and primers so that formal schooling could begin.

It soon became evident that the linguistic diversity greatly hindered
the progress of mission work, so the promotion of a lingua franca for
the whole region was considered. However, consultations had led rather
early to the realisation that the area contained two main language groups,
today known as Austronesian and non-Austronesian. With the founding of
stations in the hilly inland region, at Nobonob in 1906 and at Amele in
1916, it became clear that except for the coastal strip and offshore
islands the great majority of the people in the Madang area spoke non-
Austronesian languages. The structural differences between the two
groups seem at this point to have led the mission to abandon hope of
uniting both under a single lingua franca. But the choice of a common

language for the non-Austronesian group was extensively discussed in
annual conferences. Before linguistic data were sufficient to lead to
a decision, the disruption brought by World War I forced the postpone-
ment of the matter.

After the war this urgent question was again taken up. It was dis-
cussed in detail at the mission conference in February 1922 on the basis
of two papers on the topic 'How Can We Deal Effectively with the
Linguistic Fragmentation Existing in Our Mission Field?'.[2] The first
paper was by the Amele missionary, A. Wullenkord, who had collated
considerable material on the grammatical structures of eight languages
of the area. Basing his argument on this comparative study, on the
large population speaking Amele (4,000 by his estimate) and closely re-
lated languages, and on the fact that Amele was centrally located in
the mission's area, he strongly urged the establishment of Amele as the
lingua franca. The other paper, presented by the Nobonob missionary,
F. Schuetz, who had begun work in Nobonob a decade before the beginning
in Amele, offered just as strongly the counter-proposal that Nobonob
should be chosen. Wullenkord's arguments convinced the majority. The
conference decided that Amele should be the lingua franca and that a
school for evangelists and teachers should be established at Amele.
This school was opened in 1923 with students from Amele, Nobonob, and
the Astrolabe Bay area.

The Gedaged language seems not to have entered significantly into
the discussion in 1922. Wullenkord did indeed urge that also students
from the Austronesian area be sent to Amele for training, with a view
to the early introduction of Amele there too, making it the common lan-
guage of the whole mission field. However, this proposal was not fol-
lowed. The majority of the missionaries still seemed to think that each
of the two groups would have to have its own lingua franca. In 1924 a
school was opened on Karkar Island to train teachers and evangelists in
Gedaged, the lingua franca of the Austronesian area. So for a number of
years the mission was operating two training schools, one in each lingua
franca. Literature was slowly being produced in both languages, but it
consisted of little besides Bible stories, primers, and a monthly paper.
Men trained in these schools were being sent out to begin village schools
in their respective language areas.

Before many years had passed, this duplication of effort was seen to
be unwise. Besides aggravating the chronic staff shortage, it was also
in danger of dividing the emerging church and the community at large
into two separate groups with poor intercommunication and with conflic-
ting loyalties. In the early 1930s the matter was reconsidered, and

with the consent of the church elders it was decided to make Gedaged the
lingua franca for the entire Madang field. In 1935 a central training
school was established at Amron near Madang for training workers in the
Gedaged language, the students being drawn from the whole field. By
the time World War II interrupted the work, a fairly extensive school
system was operating, with primary schools conducted in Gedaged in many
of the villages under the mission's influence, including those of the
large non-Austronesian group.

7.4.5.4.3.2. *THE SITUATION SINCE WORLD WAR II*

After the war the school at Amron was rebuilt, and training of
workers in Gedaged was resumed. Besides the strictly religious material,
school literature available at the time included a primer, a set of
eight graded readers, a hygiene book, and a monthly paper. In the early
1950s a fair number of Gedaged schools were again in operation. The
post-war entrance of the Administration into the field of education,
however, was bringing rapid changes. The constantly rising standards
and the demand for English education made it impossible for the mission
to continue its vernacular schools in the Madang District. By 1956 the
use of Gedaged in teacher training had been given up. In that year the
Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea was founded, and Pidgin im-
mediately gained in importance as communication between church districts
increased.

At that time it was estimated that about 20,000 persons had a reason-
ably good command of Gedaged. This number will have shrunk considerably
by now, perhaps by as much as a third. Gedaged has had no significant
use in primary education for almost two decades, so outside its home
area a whole generation has grown up without learning it. It was still
used effectively in theological training until 1962, but since then its
use in education has practically disappeared. It is still possible to
find, even in non-Austronesian areas like Amele and Nobonob, a surprising
number of persons between the ages of about 25 and 45 who speak Gedaged
very well, but they rarely have occasion to do so. Gedaged is still
used in worship services in its home area and to some extent in other
Austronesian groups, but hardly at all in the non-Austronesian areas.
A few hymn books are still being sold, but there is almost no sale for
any other Gedaged literature. As a lingua franca it has been supplanted
by Pidgin with its wider usefulness, especially since the publication in
1969 of the Bible Society's Pidgin version of the New Testament.

The rapid decline of Gedaged as a lingua franca is in part attributable to the vacillation and delay in its introduction in the first place until a time when other groups had elementary literature and schooling in their own languages, which they were naturally reluctant to give up. This delay, in turn, was largely due to shortage of staff, particularly of linguistically trained persons who could assess the situation quickly and accurately. Another major cause was the meagre and unsatisfactory supply of literature in Gedaged. This too was due chiefly to shortage of expatriate staff. A few local authors developed who wrote useful material on local history, customs, and legends, but translation or authorship of most religious and educational material fell to expatriate missionaries, who were already overburdened with teaching or evangelistic duties and unable to find time for the long process of discussion, testing, and frequent revision with a variety of native informants. Much of the literature, produced in haste, was therefore flawed by an excessive degree of 'literal translation' resulting in European thought patterns and constructions that were unidiomatic to the native reader and seriously impeded comprehension. Reading without easy comprehension and enjoyment contributed little to the development of literacy and the urge to read - or to write for publication. The same danger awaits Pidgin or any other lingua franca in which the literature is scanty or is presented in an idiom that is foreign to the majority of the natural speakers of the language.

7.4.5.4. MISSIONARY LINGUE FRANCHE: BEL (GEDAGED)

N O T E S

1. Examples are 'Graged, Graget, Kranket, Ragetta', the third in this
series being the present official government spelling. The name as
pronounced by indigenous speakers is [gəda'ged]. This pattern of re-
duplication with reduction of the vowel in its first occurrence is com-
mon in the language, e.g. [bəga'beg], meaning *'orphan'* or *'servant'*.
To many ears the brevity of the shwa makes the following d˙ sound like
a trilled or flapped r, so much so that early missionaries apparently
failed to note the initial voiced velar plosive and used the last spel-
ling in the series quoted above. The final vowel they appended seems
to come from the remote demonstrative used by speakers on the mainland
or neighbouring islands when they said Gedaged a *'Gedaged yonder'*.
Other phonetic changes in these variant spellings are obvious results
of filtering through foreign phonologies.

2. The original German theme of these papers from Lutheran Mission
archives reads: *Was hat zu geschehen, um der bestehenden Sprachzer-
splitterung in unserem Missionsgebiet wirksam zu begegnen?*

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