

## 7.4.5.6. MISSIONARY LINGUE FRANCHE: GOGODALA

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### 7.4.5.6.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Gogodala tribe is not a large one, numbering at most some 10,000 people at the present time. This number has grown considerably in recent years so that in the 1950s the tribe was considerably smaller. The Gogodala people themselves are essentially a swamp and river people with sago as the staple food, as could well be expected. Sago making is the main occupation of the women of the tribe. That of the men was regarded as canoe making, and the ordinary villager still finds this his most important task. There were ceremonial rites centred around canoe making but these are largely forgotten these days. It is interesting that in Gogodala the same word is used for a woman making sago (her main occupation) and for a man making a canoe (his main occupation).

### 7.4.5.6.2. THE GOGODALA LANGUAGE

The sound of the language is very liquid with most of the consonants fronted, or made as far to the front of the mouth as the sound itself allows. Many of the people speak quickly and the language seems to roll off the tips of their tongues which can often be seen between the teeth as some sounds are made there - very fronted.

The Gogodala language is easy to make oneself understood in but quite difficult to master and to speak fluently. Many non-Gogodala-born people find the fronting of the various sounds difficult to make. Others find various parts of the grammar hard to master.

For example, the stems of intransitive verbs often change and quite unpredictably, depending on whether the subject is singular, dual or plural. For example, note the following:

English meaning	Stem for singular subject	Stem for dual subject	Stem for plural subject
<i>come</i>	pae	pae	paedae
<i>go</i>	we	nae	naedae
<i>descend</i>	pelo	kolae	kolae
<i>fall</i>	dila	nisisi	nisisila
<i>walk</i>	wamu	wami	wamidae
<i>run</i>	guladae	gugula	gugu

Some transitive verbs change the stem for plural (or dual) objects. Note the following:

English meaning	Stem for singular object	Stem for dual or plural object
<i>cut</i>	taemi	taetaemu
<i>throw</i>	miditi	baebaemi
<i>plant</i>	todae	to
<i>dig</i>	tu	tudae
<i>put</i>	mi	ali
<i>make</i>	aenaemi	aenaedaemu

For a few other verbs, the stem changes in a different way depending on the person of the object. There are very few of these.

<i>hit me</i>	napo
<i>hit you (sg.)</i>	lapo
<i>hit him (her, it)</i>	lapo
<i>hit us</i>	sapo
<i>hit you (du. or pl.)</i>	dapo
<i>hit them</i>	dapo

Then also the following:

mae	<i>give me one thing</i>
napu	<i>give me more than one thing</i>
ata	<i>give you (sg.) or him, her, it, one thing</i>
api	<i>give you (sg.) or him, her, it, more than one thing</i>
sasa	<i>give us (du. or pl.) one thing</i>
sapu	<i>give us (du. or pl.) more than one thing</i>
data	<i>give you (du. or pl.) or them one thing</i>
dapu	<i>give you (du. or pl.) or them more than one thing</i>

These verbs can get very complicated and the learner of Gogodala has to be very careful indeed and often finds it difficult to master these.

It can be argued that there is a pattern in these irregularities. This is true and is a real help to the learner of the language, but they are not predictable, and every verb has to be learnt by heart if one wishes to become perfectly fluent. There are six tenses each with their set of endings for the conjugation of the verb in singular, dual, and plural. These tenses cover actions and events (a) now taking place, (b) just immediately finished, (c) finished a little before that but still today, (d) finished yesterday, (e) taking place in the distant past - before yesterday, (f) taking place in the future. Other things like various aspects are indicated by suffixes of various orders. It will be realised from the above that each verb will have 54 tense endings depending on the number of the subject and the time. These sometimes all have to be learnt separately, but are sometimes predictable.

Most transitive verbs end in *-mi*. Indeed this suffix is a transitive marker and different parts of speech can be turned into a verb by adding it.

lewabega      *long*  
 lewabegami    *to make long, or stretch*

Adjectives have two main endings - *-napa* and *-bega*. These are used depending on the position of the adjective. If it comes before the noun, then *-napa* is used. If after the noun, then *-bega* is used.

saelenapa lumagi    *a good person*  
 lumagi saelebega    *a good person*

Either expression can be used in various ways:

or oba saelenapa lumagi    *He is a good or kind person*  
 oba lumagi saelebega

Nouns can be pluralised in different ways too. There is regularity about them but again they are not always predictable.

baiga	<i>village</i>	baigabaiga	<i>villages</i>
osama	<i>island</i>	osamasama	<i>islands</i>
susaegi	<i>woman</i>	ato	<i>women</i>
baga	<i>leaf</i>	bagigi	<i>leaves</i>
pulagi	<i>lad</i>	sekowabi	<i>lads</i>
suwakowabi	<i>lass</i>	susukowabi	<i>lasses</i>

The usual way, however, is simply to add the word for 'many' which is *waelabega*.

i    *tree*                      i waelabega    *trees*                      etc.

Gogodala also has one interesting singulariser which applies only to one class of words, but again one cannot accurately predict what words fall into this class.

dala	<i>men</i>			dalagi	<i>a man</i>
luma	<i>people</i>			lumagi	<i>a person</i>
amina	<i>teenage girls</i>			aminagi	<i>a teenage girl</i>
kakasi	<i>teenage boys (youths)</i>			kakasigi	<i>a teenage boy (youth)</i>

Many suffixes can be added to verb stems to give various meanings. One example only is given.

aenae	dae	mi	mama	delewa	mena	tama
<i>make</i>	pl.obj.	trans.	fut.	<i>you(pl.)</i>	dependent	<i>if</i>
	suffix	verb	tense	subj.	verb	

*'If you do (these things).*

It is a very interesting language indeed, but a difficult one to speak fluently, confidently, and without mistakes. There are not many non-Gogodala people who speak it as a Gogodala does. Yet there are some thousands of non-Gogodala who do speak the language.

#### 7.4.5.6.3. GOGODALA AS A MISSIONARY LINGUA FRANCA

The adoption of Gogodala as a missionary lingua franca has come about in two different ways. Firstly, there have been a number of small tribes, mostly nomadic, around the Gogodala area, mainly to the north and east. There has been some inter-marrying over the years with a marked increase more recently. As Balimo, the centre of the Gogodala area, became a patrol post and also a mission station, these various tribes became more and more involved with the Gogodala people, and learnt the language in order to be able to communicate with them.

But in the widening use of Gogodala, more important has been the growth of the church. For quite a number of years, all pastoral training was done in the Gogodala language and so men from other tribes who came to be trained as pastors learnt Gogodala and were trained in it. In most cases also their wives learnt the language as well.

And amazingly as these pastors went back to their own areas, they took the Gogodala language with them and used it there too. In 1950 the first two gospels in Gogodala which had been in duplicated form before, were printed by the Bible Society.

It was many years before there were Scriptures in other languages of the Evangelical Church of Papua area. So the pastors tended to use the Gogodala Scriptures and thus keep to this language, and often encouraged others to learn the language as well.

Where missionaries were based, the use of Gogodala did not grow but instead the local language was reduced to writing and ministry was carried out in that language. But where there were no missionaries, Gogodala tended to spread.

In the Bituri Creek area of the Trans-Fly, Gogodala pastors went to preach. They were followed not much later by Gogodala school teachers. Between them, the pastors and teachers were interested in helping the Bituri people (who spoke some five different languages themselves) become literate so that they could read the Gogodala Scriptures (the only Scriptures available); and also help them to be able to write letters and communicate with others of their tribe who were away working on plantations etc., and to be able to know the wider world in general.

In this they were helped by the fact that primers and readers in Gogodala (two separate sets) had been prepared. These they accepted and used to teach others the language orally as well as literacy in it. The other thing that helped was the production of a whole Bible series of Sunday School lessons, in Gogodala. And so the church took the language south and west as well.

Then in addition to this, the education programme of the church became more intense. At first, with the small number of teachers available, young people were selected from many parts of the Western District (now Province) and later from the Southern Highlands to come to the 'central' school first at Balimo and then later at Awaba. Here they did their upper primary school work and beyond. These young fellows and later on a sprinkling of girls were usually 'adopted' by some Gogodala family who would look after them, do their cooking for them, and take them to villages for weekends. Because of this, these young people learnt Gogodala to be able to converse with their adopters, and with other village people. These young people didn't really take the language back and teach their own tribes. But in most of their tribes there were Gogodala pastors who went as missionaries and with whom they could converse. And for some years Gogodala Scriptures were the only ones available for them wherever they were.

Gradually, however, more and more pastor training centres in various vernaculars were opened. Also more and more schools in the church area were opened up in the two districts so that people are no longer coming now into the Gogodala area. Also as the church grows more and more, local Christians are training as pastors. The effect of this is that Gogodala influence is shrinking back to the Lower Fly area of the Western District (now Province).

Neither mission nor church ever made a policy decision to use Gogodala as a church lingua franca. It just happened that way. So much so that anywhere in the rural Lower Fly area Gogodala is known, and anyone wishing to communicate in the area can do so in the Gogodala language. With the emphasis at present on English, Pidgin and Hiri Motu as contenders as national languages of Papua New Guinea, how long Gogodala will continue to be spoken widely in this area remains to be seen.