

THE PHONEMES OF RAGA

D.S. Walsh

(University of Auckland)

1. *Introduction:* Raga, otherwise known as Pentecost Island, is in the Northern New Hebrides. It was discovered by Bougainville in 1768, and it is probably most widely known as the home of the "land-divers". The island is about 36 miles long, running roughly North-South, and up to 100 miles wide. The estimated population in 1954 was about 8,000.

The informant for this study was Anna Mugida, aged 19, whose home district was Lamalanga, at the North-West end of the island. Her visit to Auckland was her first journey away from Raga, but in Lamalanga she had become fluent in Mota, French and English in addition to her own language.

2. *Previous Descriptions of Raga:* Hollyman (1960) lists 8 languages or dialects for Raga Island. Of these, Lamalanga is the only one that has been described to any significant extent, and for the purposes of this paper the language of Lamalanga will be referred to as Raga.

Codrington (1885) was instrumental in recording the only extant Raga texts: Genesis, 4 gospels, Acts, Psalms and Prayer Book. For his orthography Codrington distinguished 5 vowels and 18 consonants. (See Table I.)

	labialised	bilabial	labiodental	alveolar	velar	back velar	pharyngeal
voiceless stops		(p)		(t), "t", t	(k), "k", k		
voiced	(q), "bw", bw			(d), "d", d			
nasalised stops	mbw	(mb), "mb", mb		(nd), "nd", nd	(g), "ng", ng		
frictionless voiced nasals	(m), "m", mw			(n), "n", n	(ŋ), "ng", ŋ		
vibrants flapped and voiced				(r), "r", r (l), "l", l			
voiceless central fricatives	fw		(v), "v", f				(h), "h", h
voiced						(g), "g", x	
grooved voiceless				(s), "s", s			
semi-vowel	(w), "w", w						

() = Codrington's orthography. " " = Ivens's orthography. | | = phonemic symbol

Table I.

Ivens (1938), on the basis of these written texts, produced a grammar and description of Raga in which he modified Codrington's orthography slightly, and made some statements on what we would now call the *free variation* of some of his consonants.

Ivens' orthographic symbols are shown on the chart, thus: "b". He distinguished the 5 vowels and among his consonants listed "p" only as a variant of "b", and "k" and "g", "t" and "d", "d" and "nd" as variants in initial position. He also regarded "b" and "mb", "v" and "b"; "w" and "bw", as pairs of variants.

3. *The Method and Limits of this Study:* When it was found that an informant for Raga was available in Auckland it was decided to make an effort to clarify the phonology by determining the actual phonemic contrasts that occur in the language. Some time was spent eliciting the equivalents for the Swadesh 215 word list and for about 100 additional words. All these equivalents were recorded on tape with the informant saying each word clearly twice for the sound recording, and then transcribed.

In analysing this data a search was made for *minimal pairs*, or, failing that, for *contrasts* in similar environments for all the postulated phonemes, and particularly for those groupings of phonemes coming under the heading of "suspicious pairs" as discussed by Pike (1949).

Because stretches of continuous speech longer than "words" were not worked with, the possibility of juncture phonemes lay outside the scope of the study. Also, at this stage, there has been no detailed study made on the range and nature of allophonic variation within the phonemes.

4. *The Phonemes:* The chart does not attempt to give a precise phonetic description, but is merely an attempt to indicate the area of articulation and the general zone of phonetic classification.

Five vocoid phonemes |u| |i| |o| |e| |a| are distinguished, with minimal pairs for all possible contrasts except |u|: |i|, which are so far apart phonetically that it is justifiable on the basis of the other data to regard them as distinct. To illustrate the method, the minimal pairs for the vocoid phonemes are listed in full -

u : o	ilul "hair"	—	ilol "to know"
u : e	manul "bird"	—	manel "money"
u : a	fusil "mountain"	—	fasil "four"
o : i	borol "buttocks"	—	biril "seed"
o : e	bobol "upper part of body"	—	bebel "butterfly"
o : a	doxol "to live"	—	daxal "blood"
i : e	biril "seed"	—	berel "lest"
i : a	ilol "to know"	—	alol "sun"
e : a	matel "to die"	—	matal "eye"

21 non-vocoid phonemes are distinguished, and are shown on the chart, thus: |t|. The data for each of the "suspicious pairs" is as follows:-

r : l	biril "seed"	—	bilil "mud"
	rual "two"	—	lual "to vomit"
fw : f	contrasting distribution initially :		
	fwisil "a kind of bird"	—	fisil "star"

contrasting distribution medially:

	sifwiringi	"a root plant"	—	sifiriu	"parrot"
t : nd	mata	"eye"	—	manda	"withered leaf"
t : d	tata	"father"	—	dada	"to look up"
nd : d	contrasting medially:				
	manda	"withered leaf"	—	dada	"to look up"
n : nd	mana	"to laugh"	—	manda	"withered leaf"
mw : m	contrasting initially:				
	mwatua	"right hand"	—	maturu	"to sleep"
k : x	keki	"here"	—	xeki	"this"
t : x	tata	"father"	—	xaxa	"to fly"
t : k	tea	"one"	—	kea	"he/that"
bw : b	contrasting initially:				
	bwatu	"head"	—	bata	"bed"
mbw : mb	contrasting medially:				
	mambwe	"a kind of tree"	—	mambo	"to breathe"

Within the limits of the material there are no satisfactory contrasts for |b| : |mb|, |bw| : |mbw|, |mbw| : |mb|, but they are distinguished provisionally because of consistent phonetic differences in positions where conditioning appeared unlikely, and because of their congruence with both the particular phoneme pattern of Raga, and with the general phoneme pattern of Melanesian languages. Further investigation over a wider range of data will be necessary before these three provisional phonemic contrasts can be regarded as conclusively established.

5. *Conclusions and Comments:* 21 non-vocoid phonemes have been distinguished, as compared with Codrington's 18 and Ivens' 17 consonantal orthographic units. Of the phonemes not described in earlier descriptions, |fw| has been established by contrasting initially and medially with |f|; |nd| has been established as contrasting medially with |d| (in the orthographies this pair were regarded as in free variation); |mbw| has been provisionally distinguished on the basis of apparent occurrence and congruence; |mb| has been provisionally distinguished from |b| on the basis of congruence (in the orthographies this pair were regarded as in free variation).

This study has indicated the previous unsuspected existence of a range of phonemically significant nasalised stops |mbw|, |mb|, |nd|, and |ng| which are consistent with the consonant pattern of the language. Because of the tendency of the consonant patterns of languages to internal symmetry |mbw| and |mb| are likely phonemes, and further investigation may reveal that |p|, |g|, and |pw| are phonemically significant.

Although |bw|, |mbw|, |mb|, |nd|, |ng|, |mw|, and |fw| have been transcribed as multiple symbols to maintain as much consistency as possible with existing orthographic practice, they are regarded as unit phonemes. The realisation that these are unit phonemes makes it more readily apparent that there are no consonant-phoneme clusters within the morpheme in Raga, which is a considerable aid to work at the

morphemic level.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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