



VANUATU BISLAMA

*A brief guide to reading and speaking
the Vanuatu Bislama language*

PACIFIC LANGUAGE WEEKS



Ministry for
Pacific Peoples

Lanwis blong Vanuatu

Languages of Vanuatu

Vanuatu has the highest linguistic density in the world, with over 120 Indigenous languages spoken by a population of just over 300,000. Vanuatu's Indigenous languages are historically related, developing since settlement of the Vanuatu archipelago more than 3000 years ago.

Bislama is the National language of Vanuatu, as well as its lingua franca – it is spoken by almost all ni-Vanuatu and you can hear it in the market places and banks, in schools, and even in Parliament. Bislama is one of three official languages in Vanuatu, alongside English and French.

Bislama is a dialect of Melanesian Pidgin, along with Papua New Guinea's Tok Pisin and Solomon Islands Pijin. The language developed in the 1800s, through the Pacific shipping trade, and on plantations in Queensland Australia, Fiji and Samoa, where many ni-Vanuatu were taken, often through force, to work as indentured labourers.

When the workers returned home in the early 1900s, they brought Pidgin with them and it quickly spread throughout the Vanuatu Archipelago.

In Vanuatu, Bislama transformed from the simple system of communication used by adult workers to survive, into a stable creole language with a large vocabulary. In the townships of Vanuatu, Bislama is now the first language of some children growing up in multilingual households.

When you hear Bislama spoken, you might recognise some English and French vocabulary; however, Bislama is a complex and unique language. It combines vocabulary from English and French with grammatical structures and vocabulary from the Indigenous languages of Vanuatu. It is a trading language that helps unit the people of Vanuatu. It links the 83 or so islands in Vanuatu together.

The Vanuatu Bislama Language Standardisation project by the Vanuatu Language Service Unit in Port Vila is about to be completed.

THE SOUNDS OF BISLAMA

The sounds in Bislama are very similar to those used in English. However, there are some significant differences and there are a number of consonants present in English which are either absent or unimportant in Bislama.

Key consonants sounds in Bislama:

f → 'finger'	l → 'lamp'	p → 'spin' <i>softer than the p in 'pill'</i>	t → 'stand' <i>softer than the t in 'tank'</i>
h → 'house'	m → 'mouse'	r → 'run'	w → 'water'
k → 'skin' <i>softer than the k in 'king'</i>	n → 'nothing'	s → 'swim'	y → 'yard'
	ng → 'sing'		

Key vowel sounds in Bislama:

- a** → 'but' or 'cut'
- e** → 'bet' in closed syllables; as in French *été* 'summer' or roughly → English 'day' elsewhere
- i** → 'bit', 'fit' in closed syllables and → 'machine' in open syllables
- o** → 'long' on closed syllables and → 'go' in open syllables
- u** → 'put' in closed syllables and → 'moon' in open syllables

Diphthongs do occur in Bislama, for example the sequences *ei*, *ae*, *ao* and *oe*.

dei → day **pleplei** → play **naet** → night **faet** → fight

Currently there is no official spelling for Bislama. While there may be considerable differences in spelling, variations in Bislama pronunciation will not trouble the learner greatly. Once the limits of the variations in the key sounds or phonemes of Bislama are recognised, speaker's problem is solved. Below are some pronunciation variation rules;
f: may be realised in various areas as: **f**, or **v**. So, for example *tufala* 'the two' may be heard as *tufala* or *tuvala*.

Alfabet blong Vanuatu Bislama *Vanuatu Bislama alphabet*

Aa	Bb	Dd	Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh
Animal <i>Animol</i>	Ball <i>Bol</i>	Dance <i>Danis</i>	English <i>Inglis</i>	Friend <i>Fren</i>	Government <i>Gavman</i>	House <i>Haos</i>
Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll	Mm	Nn	Oo
Inside <i>insaed</i>	Juice <i>Jus</i>	Come <i>Kam</i>	Laugh <i>Laf</i>	Make <i>Mekem</i>	No <i>Niuspepa</i>	Turn off <i>Ofem</i>
Pp	Rr	Ss	Tt	Vv	Ww	Yy
Puskat <i>Cat</i>	roast <i>Rus</i>	Sea water <i>Solwota</i>	Talk <i>TokTok</i>	Volcano <i>Volkenu</i>	Water <i>Wota</i>	Yellow <i>Yelo</i>

Vanuatu Bislama Lanwis *Vanuatu Bislama Language*

Common Phrases

Halo	<i>Hello</i>
Tata	<i>Goodbye</i>
Plis	<i>Please</i>
Tankyu	<i>Thank you</i>
Sori	<i>Sorry</i>
Yu oraet?	<i>are you ok?</i>
Nem blong yu?	<i>what's your name ?</i>
Nem blong mi _	<i>My name is _</i>
Yu blong wea?	<i>where are you from ?</i>
Mi blong _	<i>I am from</i>
Yu wok wea?	<i>Where do you work?</i>
Mi wok long _	<i>I work at _</i>
Yu stap go wea?	<i>where are you going?</i>
Yu stap mekem wanem?	<i>What are you doing?</i>
Gudnaet	<i>Goodnight</i>
Yu olsem wanem?	<i>How are you?</i>
Mi oraet	<i>Im fine</i>
Karem wan _i kam	<i>Bring me an _</i>
Olsem wanem? I gud?	<i>How are things? OK?</i>
Lukim yu	<i>See you later</i>

Vanuatu Bislama Lanwis *Vanuatu Bislama Language*

People

Famili	<i>Family</i>	Bubu woman	<i>Grandmother</i>
Papa	<i>Father</i>	Tawi	<i>Sister/brother in law</i>
Mama	<i>Mother</i>	Kasen	<i>Cousin</i>
Ankel	<i>Uncle</i>	Pikinini	<i>Children</i>
Anti	<i>Auntie</i>	Sista	<i>Sister</i>
bubu, apu man	<i>Grandfather</i>	Brata	<i>Brother</i>

Pronouns

Mi	<i>I/me the person speaking</i>
Yu	<i>You the person being spoken to</i>
Yumi	<i>you (which can be plural) & I; the speaker and the listener (s)</i>
olgeta	<i>They/Them plural everyone</i>
Tufala	<i>They/them two people</i>
Yumitu	<i>We two/us two which includes you</i>
Mifala	<i>We/us (but not you), plural</i>
Mitufala	<i>We two/us two (but excludes you)</i>

Faith is an important aspect of Vanuatu Culture

Below is a short Hymn and Prayer that can be used at the start of your day or week.

God blong mi I kat paoa

God blong mi i gat paoa
blong i mekem evri samting mo
Hem i stap lukaot mi
Hem nomo i mekem wol ia ,i mekem
evri samting mo
Hem i stap lukaot mi.

My God can do anything

My god can do anything,
anything ,anything
My god can do anything , he
made this world and all its
fullness's
And all that I can bring to my
God, can do anything.

Yumi sarem ae yumi prea

Papa God long Heven.
Mifala i no stret long fes blong yu.
Mifala i askem yu blong fogivim
mifala long ol fasin nogud blong
mifala.
Tangkyu long ol blesing long laef
blong mifala.
Papa, plis yu tijim mifala blong
mekemgud mo lavem ol narafala.
Mifala i askem proteksen blong yu
blong tedei mo wik ia,
Mo mifala i no fogetem blong
givimbak olgeta pres, glori mo hona
i gobak long holi tron blong yu,
Long nem blong Jisas, mifala
i prea olsem.
Mo evriwan i talem... Amen

Close your eyes. Let's Pray

Dear Heavenly father.
We are not worthy to come
before you.
We ask you to forgive us for all
our wrong doings.
Thank you for all your blessings
throughout our lives.
Father, please teach us to be
kind and to love others.
We ask for your protection
throughout the day and this
week.
We give you all the praise,
glory and honor back to your
holy throne.
And we all say...Amen