Introduction

1. Preliminaries

This is the first attempt at compiling a Vitu-English dictionary. Vitu [wiv] is a western Oceanic language (part of the large Austronesian family), spoken by about 9,000 people living on the island of Vitu and some neighbouring islands in the province of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. This online Vitu dictionary covers the letters A-K, contains hundreds of audio recordings of both main entries and example sentences, as well as over 50 pictures and additional cultural background information for certain words. It is the first installment of what we hope will ultimately be a full multimedia dictionary documenting the language and various aspects of the culture of the Vitu people. For more information about the island, its people and especially the structure of the language, the reader is referred to the Vitu Grammar Sketch by René van den Berg and Peter Bachet (Ukarumpa, 2006) available online at http://www.sil.org/pacific/png/abstract.asp?id=47977

2. Orthography

Vitu orthography employs the following letters of the Roman alphabet: a, b, d, e, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v and z. The letter s only occurs in borrowings. Most letters have their expected value, but notice the following deviations.

- h stands for /ɣ/ (a voiced velar fricative);
- ng for /ŋ/ (a velar nasal);
- v for /β/ (a voiced bilabial fricative);
- z for /ð/ (a voiced dental fricative).
- The voiced plosives b, d and g are normally prenasalised, especially in medial position, so that kabe ‘leg, foot’ is phonetically [ˈkaʔɓe], kedo ‘stone’ is [ˈkeʔdɔ] and vaga ‘boat’ is [ˈʔaʔka], with ˈ marking a following stressed syllable.
- The phoneme t undergoes palatalisation before the vowel i and is realised as the palato-alveolar affricate [tʃ]: beti ‘banana’ is phonetically [ˈbaʔtʃi] and katia ‘to do, to make’ is [kaˈtʃia].
3. Organization of entries

For the organisation of the entries we have chosen a hybrid form which is partly root-based and partly lexeme-based. Derivations containing suffixes and most compounds are treated as subentries (thus following a root-based approach), while derivations with prefixes are treated as main entries (following a lexeme-based approach). We do this in order to do justice to the language and to make searching the dictionary relatively easy.

Under the main entry *hule* ‘to ask’ one therefore also finds the transitive verb *hulenia* ‘to ask someone’ as a subentry, as well as the compound verb *hule haroi* ‘to beg’.

However, the derivation *varihulei* ‘to ask each other’ (involving the prefix *vari-*) is listed as a main entry, with a cross-reference back to the root *hule*. Under *hule* the derivation *varihulei* is also cross-referenced as a related form, without further details about its meaning. However, since all prefixes in Vitu start with *v* (causative *va-*, plural object *vai-*, reciprocal *vari-*) and this version of the dictionary only covers the letters A-K, many of these cross-references are not yet available.

A few other conventions relating to the organisation of the entries are also worth mentioning.

- **The citation form of transitive verbs** always ends in *a* (e.g. *hubia* ‘to hit’) even though the final *a* is technically an object suffix and the root of the verb is *hubi*. The root appears with other pronominal objects (such as *-ho* in *hubiho* ‘hit you’, and *-au* in *hubiau* ‘hit me’), but these forms are not listed separately as they are predictable from the transitive citation form. The bare root may be found in reduplicated forms (*hubihubi*) and as the first verb in compound words (*hubi matehia* ‘kill’), but since it does not occur on its own elsewhere, it was seen to be too abstract to give *hubi* as the citation form. Admittedly, we have not been fully consistent and sometimes an abstract root is listed as the main entry, as with *habi*. We hope to find out from dictionary usage of native speakers what the preferred way of presenting these verbs is.

- **Reduplication** of verbs and nouns is very productive in Vitu, and hence these forms are not listed separately, although they do occur in example sentences. Under *berea* ‘to lay the floor joists’, for example, the example sentence contains the reduplicated form *bereberea*.

- A number of **inalienable nouns** which end in *a* actually contain the 3rd person singular possessive suffix *-a* (an allomorph of the regular form *-na*). The word *baika*, for instance, is given as ‘armpit’, but actually it means ‘his/her armpit’. The root is *baik-*, a bound root ending in a consonant which never occurs on its own but which forms the basis of the other possessive forms such as *baikigu* ‘my armpit’ and *baiki* ‘your armpit’. These forms with bound roots contrast with other inalienable nouns in *a* such as *balunga* ‘sound, voice’, where *balunga* is also the root (as shown by the regular formations *balungagu* ‘my voice’ and *balungana* ‘his/her voice’). To indicate that words such as *baika* are actually inflected forms containing a possessive suffix, the following convention is employed to indicate
the root: baika (from: baik-) ‘armpit’; banita (from banit-) ‘wing, upper arm, shoulder’.

• Most transitive verbs in Vitu have a **passive form**, e.g. hubia ‘to hit, to beat’, passive hubua ‘was hit, was beaten’; kohana ‘call’, passive kohanga ‘was called’. Because the allomorphy of passive verbs is complex (see the Vitu grammar for details), all passive verb forms are given after the part of speech, but without an English gloss. Passive verb forms are not listed as separate entries.

4. **Recordings**

We have attempted to incorporate audio recordings of virtually all main entries from A up to H as well as many of the example sentences. The voices that can be heard on the recordings are Pol Komoe and Leni Ereliu, both from the village of Balangore 1. Since there were no soundproof rooms available in the location where we worked, the recordings are not fully satisfactory, but we trust that they give a reasonable idea of what the language sounds like. After the recording we noticed that the prenasalisation of b, d and g is sometimes absent when the word is pronounced in isolation (for instance, with gago). This is possibly due to spelling pronunciation, and in example sentences the prenasalisation of b, d and g is almost always present. Other interesting features of the recordings are the presence of an initial h in the few words in the language starting with a (ae, agelo, ai, aia) and the occasional stress on final syllables with transitive verbs ending in Ca (e.g. dara, doga, dova). This is probably the 3rd person object suffix -a, but since long vowels are not written in Vitu, minimal pairs such as [ˈdara] ‘a shell’ and [dəˈraː] ‘to paint spots on it/him/her’ turn out as the homograph dara.

4. **Pictures**

For a number of items relating to flora, fauna and cultural objects we have included pictures. All these pictures were taken by ourselves or by Peter Bachet and are used with permission.

5. **Limitations**

Apart from the fact that the letters L-Z are not yet covered, there are various other limitations. The identification of birds, fish, trees and plants, for instance, is still in its infancy. Example sentences are still lacking for some entries, and for other entries they are less than adequate. Not all entries and example sentences have an accompanying recording. Finally, the treatment of transitive verb roots is not wholly consistent. We hope to make progress on all these issues in the coming years.

6. **Abbreviations**

The following abbreviations are used for parts of speech (grammatical categories):

- *adj* adjective
- *adv* adverb
Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the help of various people who have made this publication possible. Peter and Wiljo Bachet spearheaded the Vitu language development programme and Peter is still heavily involved in the Vitu Bible translation project. A big part of the data collection and all the recordings were done during a two-week workshop in Hoskins that involved both authors, as well as Leni Ereliu, Pol Komoe and Lydia van den Berg. We are grateful for the hospitality we received at the NTM base in Hoskins, and especially the practical help given by Jan Wols and Sinco ter Maat.

Contact

We would appreciate feedback on this preliminary version of the Vitu dictionary. Suggestions can be sent to r.vandenberg at sil.org.pg.