

# 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUND SYSTEM AND ORTHOGRAPHY

Charles Fries states:

In learning a new language, then, the chief problem is not at first that of learning vocabulary items. It is, first, the mastery of the sound system--to understand the stream of speech, to hear the distinctive sound features and to approximate their reproduction. It is, second, the mastery of the features of arrangement that constitute the structure of the language.<sup>1</sup>

The sound system of Tolai has thus been set out in this section to help the student realize its peculiarities. It has been contrasted with English to point out particular differences of certain sounds.

There was not time available to compare such items as the grammatical structures, vocabulary systems, or cultures between Tolai and English. Nevertheless, it is hoped the brief comparison of the sound systems will point the student in the right direction.

We quote Lado "that in the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning....."<sup>2</sup>

The student must be aware of the differences of his own sound system and strive to sound not like himself but like the native Tolai speaker. He can only do this if he is aware of the differences in sound between the two systems.

## 1 LABIALS

English: p b f v m  
Tolai: p b - v m

Examples: English: p = pin spin nip happy

Tolai: p = pot purpur pap  
to come flower dog

Problem: An English speaker will sometimes aspirate his p finally in a word. In Tolai all voiceless stops (p, t, k) are unreleased word finally. The student must be care-

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<sup>1</sup> Fries, Charles C. Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language. Ann Arbor: U. of Mich. Press, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Lado, Robert. Linguistics Across Cultures. Ann Arbor: U. of Mich. Press, 1958, p. 1.

ful not to release p word final as in pap.

Examples: English: b = *bin rub rubber*

Tolai: b = bobo bebe  
to.watch butterfly

Problem: No problem as the sounds are similar in the two languages in both positions. There is no b word finally in Tolai.

Examples: English: v = *vine live never*

Tolai: v = vana vavina avet  
to.go woman 1st.pers.excl.pl.

Problem: There is a distinct difference between the English sound and the Tolai sounds. The English sound is made by the bottom lip touching the upper front teeth. In Tolai the sound is always made with the lips held closely together and air passing between them. Before an /a/ the sound is much like the English /w/ except the lips are never rounded. In the present Tolai orthography the sound is always written as /v/. Compare the following which are first given as spelled in the New Britain Dictionary and then spelled phonetically.

<u>wiwi</u>	[bibi]	'to curl like a snake' (the line through the <u>b</u> denotes friction occurring with it)
<u>vivi</u>	[bibi]	'uncle of a woman's husband'
<u>wotowota</u>	[botobota]	'a raised stand'
<u>votovoto</u>	[botoboto]	'wages' (Fiji)

There are words that sound almost like an English /v/, e.g., [babina] /vavina/ 'woman' but in each case the lips touch together. There seem to be different degrees of friction with this sound according to the vowel following or preceding the sound and it will need to be mimicked carefully. In the prefix var- 'intransitive marker' the degree of friction is more than in the prefix va- 'causative marker'.

Examples: English: m = *mine ram hammer*

Tolai: m = mai pem amir  
to.come axe 1st.pers.excl.dual

Problem: No problem as the distribution and sound in the three positions is very similar.

## 2 ALVEOLARS

English: t d s z n l r

Tolai: t d s - n l r

Examples: English: t = tin stem net water

Tolai: t = tar amutal pot  
past.tense 2nd.pers.trial to.come

Problem: Same as with /p/ word finally. It is also necessary to recognize that there are different degrees of aspiration in the English stop series. E.g. the /t/ of tin has more aspiration than the /t/ of stem.

Examples: English: d = den nod fodder

Tolai: d = dir kadia  
3rd.pers.dual 3rd.pers.pl.poss.

Problem: There is no problem as /d/ does not occur word final in Tolai and in the other two positions the sounds are similar to English.

Examples: English: s = seal race basic cats

Tolai: s = susu balus pusi  
milk airplane cat

Problem: No problem. This sound is similar in both languages. In Tolai /s/ occurs only in loan words.

Examples: English: n = net ten sand

Tolai: n = nami ian vana  
spit eat go

Problem: There is no problem as the same type of /n/ occurs and is sounded similarly in the three positions in each language.

Examples: English: l = lip loop pill pool pillow polo

Tolai: l = amital talił laun  
1st.pers.excl.trial to.return to.live

Problem: In English either a clear /l/ (an /l/ with /i/ timbre, i.e., with relatively high front tongue position) or dark /l/ (an /l/ with high back tongue position) according to the vowel contiguous to the /l/ and the position of the /l/. In Tolai only the dark /l/ seems to occur. The student must take special care to pronounce

this phoneme correctly.

Examples: English: r = rat tar very borrow (tar = Amer. Engl. syllabic r)

Tolai: r = tar                    oro                    ra  
                  past.tense        to.call        article

Problem: The sounds presented by the symbol /r/ are very different in these two languages. In Tolai the sound /r/ is flapped (the tongue hitting once against the alveolar ridge, as in English *udder*) in each position. In some dialects the sound /r/ is trilled (the tongue hitting several times against the alveolar ridge - as in the Scottish *r*). In the above English example of /r/ word final position—in Australian English—the sound is symbolized but not sounded. The student must be especially careful to flap the /r/ word final.

### 3 VELARS

English: k g ng w

Tolai: k g ng (w)<sup>1</sup>

Examples: English: k = keel coal rock

Tolai: k = ki        ruk                    kiki        ikilik  
                  sit        come.in        chair        little

Problem: In English there is but one symbol regardless of the fact that the /k/ of coal is made further back in the mouth than the /k/ of 'keel'. Also in English the sound /k/ tends to have aspiration in all positions (even word finally with most speakers) whereas in Tolai /k/ word finally tends to be unreleased, but in other positions it is made as in the English 'coal'.

Examples: English: g = gill (of fish) saga. ragged amalgam

Tolai: g = gunan                    kaugu  
                  village        mine

Problem: No problem. The sounds are similar in both languages.

Examples: English: ng = long sing ink singer

Tolai: ng = ngala                    nongon                    bung  
                  big                    laugh                    market

<sup>1</sup> This sound (/w/) has been described under Section 1 - Labials /v/.

Problem: It will take some practice for the student to learn to say /ng/ word initially as this distribution does not take place in English. Also care must be taken when /ng/ occurs medially that a stop does not follow at the same point of articulation, as in English 'finger'.

#### 4 VOWELS

The vowels in Tolai (as in English) are not written phonemically. That is, there is not a "one-to-one correspondence between each phoneme and the symbolization of that phoneme".<sup>1</sup>

Although this will be a problem for the European student initially, thousands of people have learned to read and write their language with its present orthography. It, therefore, does not seem wise to recommend any changes. The present Tolai literate speakers (as those in English) would be at a loss if the present orthography were changed. In our work the Tolai informants often suggested that our phonetic spellings were wrong.

English: i e u o a

Tolai: i e u o a

Examples: English: i = beat bead weep keep

Tolai: i = bīta īau īna tī  
to.hit I I.will really

Problem: The student must remember that the sound symbolized by /ee/ in English is pronounced as /i/ in Tolai. Also note that sometimes /i/ is pronounced as /y/ initially in Tolai, e.g. īau [yau] 'I'; other times it is pronounced /i/ initially, e.g. īna 'I will'.

OR

Examples: English: ɪ = bit bid wit kit city

Tolai: ɪ = vīngai īkilīk pīn kīkil  
how.long little fold all.around

Problem: In English there is a minimal difference between the /i/ in 'beat' and the /ɪ/ in 'bit'. In Tolai /ɪ/ (as in English 'bit') is an allophone of /i/ and occurs preceding velars or between stops and nasals (when they occur together). These are the same

<sup>1</sup> Pike, Kenneth L., 1947. Phonemics. Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, p. 208.

sound to the Tolai speaker and he adjusts automatically, but the expatriate student must recognise the allo-  
phonic distribution.

Examples: English: e = mate cape made way (as in Britain and  
America)

Tolai: e = ave beo  
1st.pers.excl.pl bird

OR

English: ε = met bed kettle contest

Tolai: ε = pem avet en  
axe 1st.pers.excl.pl fish

Problem: The /e/ sound (as in Tolai beo and American English 'mate') will require practice on the Australian English speakers' part. Preceding nasals in any position or stops word final /ε/ is an allophone of /e/ in Tolai. Remember that in English these two sounds are not allophones but are nevertheless written with one symbol.

Examples: English: u = pool cool (as in English and American  
dialects)

Tolai: u = una puak u turagu  
you.will carry you my.brother

Problem: In Tolai the /u/ is not pronounced the same in all positions. In the word turagu 'my brother' the sound is lowered toward mid-way to the /o/ position as in English foot or put. In other positions (that is, word initial and contiguous to other vowels) it is pronounced as in English.

Examples: English: o = note notation coat quotation  
Mexico (again as in British English and  
American dialects)

Tolai: o = pot nongon boko  
come laugh later

Problem: There will be a problem for Australian English speakers to pronounce this /o/ correctly and not to glide it. The symbol /o/ in the Tolai orthography also stands for the vowel /ɔ/ as in Australian English pot or American English caught. The exact distribution of this sound has not been decided upon (except that word finally it occurs before nasals) and its distribution will have to be learned by the student, e.g. /okor/ [ɔkor] 'root'; /doldol/ [dɔldɔl] 'cold'; /lolovina/ [lɔlɔbina] 'long'

and /kaum/ [kɔm] 'yours'.

Examples: English: a = father far part

Tolai: a = maia vana a  
yes to.go a

OR

English: ʌ = but cup china above

Tolai: ʌ = vana ina  
to.go I.will

Problem: It will be noted from the above examples that there are both what we call long and short /a/ in English and Tolai. However, in Tolai the short /a/ seems to occur only word final following nasals and is therefore non-phonemic.

There is another difficulty with the present Tolai orthography concerning the symbol /a/. Some words written with this symbol (e.g. tar 'past tense marker' sound more like ter and are written as such in some orthographies. Be alert for this.

## 5 STRESS

The tendencies of the accent system will be dealt with here. In the examples ' denotes stress.

5.1 The article a 'the' or 'a' is not stressed in the utterance.

A 'pap. It is a dog.  
A 'beo 'nam. It is a bird. or, That is a bird.

5.2 The future tense marker a 'will' is not stressed in an utterance.

A'mital a 'oro. We (excl.3) will call out for.  
'Diat a 'bobo. They (pl) will look.

5.3 Following velar nasals (ng) ia is stressed. The preceding consonant takes the stress in other utterances.

'Da(t) 'vung 'ia. We (incl.pl.) are putting.  
'Dat a 'ka'p ia. We (incl.pl.) will take.  
'Iau tar 'ki'ta ia. I have struck.

5.4 Stress usually occurs on the second syllable of a word.

Di'tal They (3)  
Ki'ta To hit

- 5.5 Reduplicated forms (two syllable) are usually stressed syllable initial.

'bobo to look . 'gege crooked

- 5.6 In normal speech there is a definite syllable timing with a light stress which seems to take place on every other syllable. This is stress super-imposed over the intonation system and can be distinctly heard. The student must pay particular attention to it on the tapes and in normal conversation and mimic it in order to sound like a Tolai speaker.

## 6 INTONATION

The intonation system does not seem to be as important as the stress. There are a couple of minor exceptions and these will be dealt with first.

- 6.1 The question indicator dave. The marker dave introduces a normal statement that is to be given a different intonation to signal a question, e.g.

Dave, iau vatang malia iat? Did I speak correctly?

Dave, kaum tinata i dekdek? Is your language hard?

Dave, u nunure kaugu tinata? Do you understand my language?

The marker dave has a falling intonation. The statement then follows with a rising intonation with an ending very high.

- 6.2 Commands usually start on a high level and stay on this level until the very end of the command when the intonation falls rapidly to a low level. E.g.

Vatang ia mulai. Say it again.

Tata vovoven. Speak slowly.

Vatang ia mara tinata tuna. Say it in Tolai.

- 6.3 Continuous discourse. When two or more speakers are talking and the conversation is expected to continue the intonation level ends quite high leaving an air of expectancy. This is immediate-



ly followed by an utterance by the next speaker. This will be noticed immediately but will require practice on the speaker's part.

- 6.4 Statements. The intonation of normal statements is much the same as that of commands with the exception that the drop from high level to low level is quicker and more pronounced.

Iau nunure a ik.

I understand a little.

Iau tar valubane.

I have forgotten.

- 6.5 Short questions. Short questions start on a high level and drop suddenly to low.

Ava nam?

What is that?

Ava go?

What is this?

- 6.6 There does not seem to be any separate intonation pattern for normal questions with the exception that the question indicator may be influenced in some cases.

I vana uve?

Where did he go?

Akave ra buk?

Where is the book?

Vingai na pot?

When is he coming?

Aivia taim?

How many sisters?

- 6.7 Negative statements. The negative marker usually takes a different level of intonation from the rest of the utterance.

Upi ra ava pa u tata?

Why don't you speak?

Pa iau nunure kaum tinata.

I don't speak your language.

- 6.8 For the remainder of the intonation contours it would be well if the student paid particular attention to how surprise, excitement, sarcasm, etc., are formed. Remember that the stress pattern is the most important.

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