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Dutton, T.E. & C.L. Voorhoeve. 1974. Beginning Hiri Motu  
(Pacific Linguistics, Series D - No.24)

Hiri Motu - or, to give it the name used in earlier literature, Police Motu - is the lingua franca of Papua. Nobody knows precisely when it first arose; the earliest references cited by Dutton & Voorhoeve go back to 1904, and are typically unflattering.

Despite a government policy of fostering the use of English as a means of communication among different linguistic groups in Papua,<sup>1</sup> Police Motu clearly filled a need, and was already widespread in the coastal and subcoastal areas of the country by the second World War. Since the War, its position has been challenged by the movement of Pidgin-speaking police, administration personnel and other workers from New Guinea into Papua. This notwithstanding, the language is still widely spoken and has if anything extended its range in the post-war period, notably as the result of the recruiting activities of the Australian Petroleum Company.

The term 'Hiri Motu' employed in the title of Dutton & Voorhoeve's book reflects the attractive but possibly mistaken idea that the lingua franca had its origins in pre-colonial times, when it was (so it is alleged) used by the Motu and their trading partners in the Gulf. The little evidence I have seen on this (notably a paper by Iru Kakare<sup>2</sup>) seems to support rather the view that the Motu used a (pidginized?) form of Elema in the Elema-speaking parts of the Gulf; possibly a comparable form of one of the local languages was also used in the Purari delta.

The present book represents a milestone in the description and documentation of Hiri Motu. It includes a treatment of the grammar of the language; a substantial collection of oral texts (something which has so far been completely unavailable); and extensive information on the lexicon. Students of Police Motu and scholars who are concerned with the study of pidgin languages must be very grateful to the authors for its publication.

The orthography employed is that used in printed texts of Motu, except that the distinction between g and ḡ (the voiced velar fricative) is ignored. This involves representing a number of distinctions (such as ai and ae) which are, I believe, widely lost among Hiri Motu speakers. Numerous alternative forms, intended to reflect supposed

regional variation, are also cited; thus karikari is said to be a variant of kahirakahira 'close' in the Western and Gulf Provinces. The 'Hiri Motu-English vocabulary' also indicates primary stress.

The lexicon is presented in three sections: the 'Hiri Motu-English vocabulary' just referred to, an English-Motu finder list, which is to be used in conjunction with the vocabulary,<sup>3</sup> and a section entitled 'useful word groups'. In a few cases, a word occurs in one list but not another, for no apparent reason; thus, gaḡaia is listed under body parts in the 'useful word groups' but is left out of the main vocabulary. Similarly, the important tree called irimo is listed (along with rabia, goru and gea) under flora, but does not make it into the main list. Inevitably, a few fairly common words are left out entirely; I note in passing reta 'coconut frond', bosea 'basket', holoa 'to stand up (a post)', hatoa 'to pronounce (a name)', haroroa 'to pull tight', vasiahu 'gravy', aivara 'pole', dehoro 'coconut oil' and ivitoto 'hammock'. The word utua should include among its meanings 'to draw (water)'. On the other hand, there are a number of words which I do not recognise; but this is probably due to my ignorance.

The grammar is presented in the first ten units of the book. The points discussed are treated clearly, accurately and with plentiful exemplification. The authors present the numerals from one to twenty in their Motu forms, with the warning that 'many speakers use the English names for the numbers' (57); in fact, I believe that there are a great many excellent speakers of Hiri Motu around from whom you will get only a blank look if you use forms like taurahanita for 'nine'.

Apart from the grammatical material, the first ten units each contain a short text. In addition, units eleven and twelve are made up entirely of a collection of 28 such texts, representing people from nearly every province of the country in which Hiri Motu is still in use. Though I think the authors are to be lauded for including such a wealth of oral material in their book, I am inclined to think it would have proved pedagogically

better, at least in the first few units, to use written texts which can be easily collected from literate speakers of Hiri Motu and which might have avoided some of the false starts and obscurities which occur in the tape-recorded materials.

Nitpicking apart, this is by far the best published study available on the Papuan lingua franca. I recommend it highly.

#### NOTES

1. 'By an order in council, white officials are instructed to use English in speaking to Government native employees, police and prisoners and to extend, where possible, a knowledge of English'. (Smith 1927:25).
2. I am grateful to Peter Mühlhäusler for this reference.
3. Occasionally, this is important. The English-Motu finder list, for example, glosses coconut as karu, niu; only if you consult the main vocabulary will you discover that karu means specifically 'a green coconut'.

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John Harris  
Canberra College of Advanced  
Education.

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