

# **Pijin**

**A dictionary of the pidgin of the Solomon Islands  
Un dictionnaire du pidgin des Îles Salomon**

**Pijin-Ingglis-Franis  
(Pijin-English-French)  
(Pijin-Anglais-Français)**

**by / par**

**Christine Jourdan**

**with the collaboration of  
Ellen Maebiru**

**To the memory of Calvin Sufaka Fifi'i,  
graceful and brave**

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

List of abbreviations

Introduction

1. About the dictionary

1.1 Scope of the dictionary

1.2 Structure of the dictionary

1.3 Analysis

1.3.1 Reduplication

1.3.2 Stative verbs vs adjectives

2. A brief history of Solomon Islands Pijin

2.1 Contemporary Pijin

2.1.1 Urban Pijin

3. Pijin phonology

3.1 Variability

3.1.1 The vernaculars

3.1.2 English

3.1.3 Urbanisation

3.2 Short pronunciation guide

3.2.1 Vowels

3.2.2 Consonants

3.2.3 Examples

Pijin–english–french dictionary

English finder list

French finder list

References

---

## Acknowledgments

### Gathering friends and words

This dictionary is the product of friendships and relationships.

It started long ago, in 1982, during my first fieldwork in the Solomon Islands, without my being aware of it. I had made a habit of writing down words and their definitions, together with examples, and eliciting even more, with no other intent than increasing my vocabulary. At the time, my son Guillaume (then aged two) and I were living in Vura (Honiara) with Seda and Muina Fifi'i and the two children they had then, Kevin and Janet aged three and two. They took us in and taught us Pijin, with generosity and affection. Our friendship all these years has shaped my understanding of the Solomon Islands. Over the years, we have shared the joys of seeing our children grow, and the tragedies of losing our loved ones. On 16 February 1998 their son Calvin, aged fourteen, died of cancer. This dictionary is dedicated to his spirit.

As of 1993, I started to think about this dictionary in a more systematic way. That year, I went to live with Scriven and Loyce Pabulu and their daughters Sama and Kazarai, who continue to extend their warm hospitality to me every time I go back to the Solomons. I am very grateful to them for their generosity and their friendship. Scriven is from Choiseul and Loyce from Ranongga. Living with them, sharing their life and learning through them and their friends the ways of the Western Solomons made me realise how Malaita-centric was my view of the Solomons, linguistic and cultural. Gently but firmly Scriven and Loyce corrected that lopsided attention to Malaita, and if there is some measure of linguistic and ethnographic representation and balance in the dictionary, their influence and gentle coaching played a major role in it.

But the words needed a champion, and they found one in the person of Ellen Maebiru, my friend and colleague of many years. She embarked on the dictionary project as if to revive and gather a treasure that had lain dormant for a long time. Together we searched for words everywhere: in people's speech, in her memory, in the books and the newspapers I had accumulated over the years, on the radio programs and in the popular songs I had transcribed, in the prayer books and literacy materials produced by SICA and LASI, in early dictionaries and word lists, in all my fieldnotes, and in the 200 interviews in Solomons Pijin that I had recorded over the years in Honiara, 'Avu 'Avu and various places of Malaita. As the treasure of words grew, so also did our friendship and the children in our lives.

In the Solomons, many people helped me generously by explaining words and meanings, but I want to thank particularly: the late Jonathan Fifi'i, who served as a mentor to me and who, with infallible patience and gentleness, guided my early years in the Solomon Islands; Dora Alitoni; the late Andrew Adifaka; the late Domenico Alibua; John and Mary Anga; Margaret Beni; Jack Fifi'i; Muina and Seda Fifi'i; Laurence Foana'ota; Clement and Georgina Honi; Rex and Mary Horoi; Henry Isa; Sir Mariano and Lady Luisa Kelesi; the late Geoffrey Kuper; the late Raymond Maebiru; Rose Maebiru; John Maene'adi; John Naitoro; Scriven and Loyce Pabulu; Elizabeth and John Ratu; Salomé Samou; Colin Rugebatu; John Roughan. I am also grateful to Robert H. Lindley, from the Rural Fishing Enterprises Project, for supplying names of fish, and

to Dr Conery, of the Department of Contagious Diseases at the Ministry of Health, for supplying names of diseases in Pijin and their English glosses.

Other friends have played an important role: Ambassador Rex Horoi, with his continuous support of a project that he could have carried out himself, had he had the time. His work on the Instructional Material he co-authored for the Peace Corps in 1978 was seminal in my early understanding of Pijin. David Akin and David Gegeo have done me the honour of going over the draft I had sent them with a lot of care, supplying words, additional meanings, examples, encouragement and corrections. I am extremely grateful to them. Thanks are due also to John Naitoro, Tarcisius Tara and John Tuhaika, who made very useful suggestions on a previous draft, and to Gerry Beimers, Ben Burt, Richard Feinberg, Simon Foale, Pierre Maranda, Kazuko Obata, Andrew Pawley, Malcolm Ross, Ian Scales, Linda Simons, Angela Terrill, and Julian Treadaway, and Kevin Tuitewho have all, in different ways and at different times, provided enlightening answers to some of my frantic queries about meanings, analyses or glosses of words. I am particularly grateful to Dr Annie Walter, then with ORSTOM in Port Vila (Vanuatu) for the generosity with which she shared her data and knowledge of fruits of the Pacific. I am also very grateful to Ian Scales for his precious coaching on the mysteries of the Multi Dictionary Formatter. At home, Holly Buchanan, Jane Lebrun, Ingrid Mittmannsgruber, Rachel Selbach, Robbyn Seller and Rebecca Silverstone (all at one time or another students in the department of Anthropology at Concordia University in Montreal) were central to the practical aspects of dictionary building, inputting data and providing much useful advice and a very cheerful working environment. Holly Buchanan's technical mastering of the early versions of Shoebox and Multi Dictionary Formatter used for this dictionary made her indispensable. I cannot thank her enough. Most of the drawings contained in this dictionary were done by Ken Garhum, of Toronto, and I thank him here most warmly.

The bulk of this dictionary was completed while I was on sabbatical leave from January to June 1998 in the Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, at the Australian National University. I wish to thank Professor Andrew Pawley and members of the Department for their support and generosity during that time. But most importantly, I have greatly benefited from the work of four scholars, whose knowledge of Pijin or of its cousin, Bislama, have influenced me much. Terry Crowley's impressive *A new dictionary of Bislama* has been a constant source of inspiration as well as a cause for envy. Linda Simons and Hugh Young's *Pijin Blong Yumi* dictionary was a ground-breaking work; now a classic, this little book contributed much to my knowledge of Pijin and I consider it the stepping stone to this dictionary. But these pages would not be complete without the presence of the late Roger Keesing. This dictionary is a testimony to Roger's great knowledge and passion for the Solomon Islands, which he communicated to me more than he ever knew.

Finally, I am particularly grateful to Guillaume Chouteau and Kevin Tuite for the undying patience with which they endured all my years of obsession with this dictionary.

---

## List of abbreviations

### 1. Grammatical abbreviations

abbreviations	meaning\signification	example
3pp	3rd person plural personal pronoun\pronom personnel, 3e personne du pluriel	olketa
act. vt.	active verb, transitive\verbe d'action transitif	ridim
act. vi.	active verb, intransitive\verbe d'action intransitif	rid
adj.	adjective\adjectif	gud\gudfala
adj. num. card.	numeral\adjectif numeral cardinal	toti
adj. num. ord.	numeral\adjectif numeral ordinal	mekten
adv.	adverb\adverbe	samtaem
aux.	auxiliary\auxiliaire	save
caus.	causative\causal	dastawe
cl. marker	clause marker\marqueur de préposition	nogud
conj.	conjunction\conjonction	den
def. art.	definite article\article défini	olketa
deic.	deictic\déictic	ia
dem. pron.	demonstrative pronoun\pronom démonstratif	diswan
dur.	durative\marqueur de durée	gogo
excl.	exclamation	olketa!
excl.	exclusive (used with personal pronouns only) exclusif (utilisé uniquement avec les pronoms personnels)	mitufala
expr.	expression	naf nao!
incl.	inclusive (used with personal pronouns only) inclusif (utilisée seulement avec les pronoms personnels)	iumitufala
ind. art.	indefinite article\article indéfini	wanfala
interj.	interjection\interjection	eskus!
interr.	interrogative\pronom interrogatif	hu
loc. prep.	locative preposition\préposition locative	atsaet

mod.	modal\verbe modal	stap
n.	noun\nom	mun
pers. pron.	personal pronoun\pronom personnel	hem
pl.	plural\pluriel	
prep. vt.	prepositional verb\verbe prépositionnel	agensem
prep.	preposition	fo
prop. n.	proper noun\nom propre	Aoke
refl. pron.	reflexive pronoun\pronom réfléchi	seleva
rel. pron.	relative pronoun\pronom relatif	wea
seq.	sequencer	gogo
sg.	singular\singulier	
stat.	stative\verbe d'état	siki

## 2. Organisational abbreviations

CBSI	Central Bank of the Solomon Islands
CDC	Crown Development Corporation
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agencies
LASI	Literacy Association of the Solomon Islands
NBSI	National Bank of the Solomon Islands
PWD	Public Works Department
SIBC	Solomon Islands Broadcast Corporation
SICA	Solomon Islands Christian Association
SICHE	Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
SIPL	Solomon Islands Plantation Limited
SITAG	Solomon Islands Translation Advisory Group

## 3. Other abbreviations

Abor.	Aboriginal
arch.	archaic
Aust.	Australian
Eng.	English
Fr.	French

Hon.	Honiara
Mala.	Malaita
N. Mal.	North Malaita
off.	offensive
pej.	pejorative
Pij.	Pijin
Pij. urb.	Pijin urbain
Pol.	Polynesian
Port.	Portuguese
Rare	rare
Reg.	regional
Rur.	rural
sl.	slang
Urb. Pij.	urban Pijin
y.	young

---

## Introduction

### 1. About the dictionary

Pijin is the youngest of the languages of the Solomon Islands, yet it is the most important in terms of number of speakers and the role it plays in the life of the archipelago. It is known in all parts of the country, and used widely everywhere for intergroup communication, particularly in urban centres. But if Pijin is widely spoken, it is not widely written. Despite the efforts of the Literacy Association of the Solomon Islands (LASI) and the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) through the works of SITAG, the language is not a popular medium of written communication. There are many reasons for this situation: Pijin lacks institutional support from government agencies and it lacks cultural legitimacy. Moreover, schooling at advanced levels is done in English. It is hoped that this dictionary will give a higher profile to Pijin and will help bring about changes in people's attitude towards this language.

This cultural dictionary of Pijin is aimed at three different publics: Solomon Islanders who wish to write in Pijin and need to check the spelling of words; visitors to the country who wish to learn Pijin or to know more about it; and scholars who seek to obtain precise and easily accessible linguistic information on the language. Rich in examples, drawings, historical and ethnographic documentation, the dictionary gives access to the Solomon Islands as well as to Pijin. Each of the three intended audiences may refer to the Pijin dictionary to obtain information on the history of the language, its cultural anchorage, the history, customary ways and geography of the archipelago, and aspects of flora, fauna and food.

#### 1.1 Scope of the dictionary

It is in the nature of a dictionary to lag behind the changes and the innovations that are associated with the transformation of languages in the course of their history. This one is no exception to the rule. However, in writing this dictionary I have sought to be as exhaustive as possible when it comes to the recording of words, meanings, spellings, expressions, etc. Whatever words I have forgotten, or have not recorded, or which have appeared in the lexicon of Pijin very recently, will be entered in the next edition of the dictionary. There will always be people who will object to the presence of some words or the absence of others, to the spelling choices I made, to the translation and examples I give for a particular word. And there will also be people who will dismiss some words or choices by saying: *disfala wod ia, hemi no stret*, or *mifala no save raetem wod olsem*, or again *rabis wod olsem, hem no fitim diksonari*. I am reconciled to these objections because I recognise that no one speaker can know each and every word and meaning of their own language, but only a part of it. And I realise that people tend to judge and evaluate linguistic and cultural productions from the perspective of what they know and believe is right or wrong. This leads many of us to dismiss as erroneous or inappropriate spelling conventions, pronunciation choices, or translations made by others simply because these choices do not correspond to the ones we would have made ourselves, or simply because we do not know them. In addition, we have to remember that spelling conventions are arbitrary written representations of spoken sounds. By writing words down, we freeze their written form, but we

do not influence, in the short run, the various ways in which the same word is being pronounced in various parts of the Solomon Islands.

In compiling this dictionary, I was guided by the principles which I have set out below.

First, I conceived of this dictionary as being a repository of Pijin words and usage, as well as of the cultural worlds that are sustained by Pijin. This implies that I included all the words I could find, old and new, rural or urban, gender-marked or age-marked, without making any selection. Whatever I found, I entered into the dictionary. As a result, the dictionary contains old words and new ones, even though many people may not know them. To find all the words and their meanings, I used many sources: the 200 tape-recorded interviews in Pijin that I have made over the last 15 years with people originating from all over the Solomon Islands, young and old, women and men, girls and boys, educated or not; the systematic elicitation of words with Solomon Islanders on particular themes; the recordings of radio programs; the lyrics of popular songs, and poetry; natural conversations between friends; and the words supplied by friends and colleagues over the years (see Acknowledgments section). All these spoken words were supplemented by written words as they were found in Linda Simons' and Hugh Young's (1978) dictionary *Pijin blong Iumi*; the small *Peace Corps dictionary* compiled by Laura Guyer-Miller (1989); the *Buk blong wei fo raetem olketa word long Pijin* produced by the Sica Pijin Literacy Project (1982); the *Pijin word list* compiled by Gerry Beimers and produced by SICA (1995); the *Niu Testamen*; the book *The big death*; the cartoons published on the back cover of the magazine *Link*. Whenever possible, the examples used in the dictionary are taken from the Corpus of 200 taped interviews recorded in the Solomon Islands. When no sentence could be found for a particular word, I asked Solomon Islands friends to give me a sentence that would include that word. Helen Maebiru proved to be a great source of examples over the years when we could not find a good example in the taped interviews. Some examples work better than others in that they not only illustrate how a word can be used in a sentence, but they also give an indication as to what the meaning of that word is.

Drawing the line between English and Pijin proved to be the biggest problem in many cases. What allowed me to decide whether some words were truly part of Pijin, rather than English words pronounced with a Oceanic phonology, was how widespread the usage was in the population. After having done all the cross-checkings possible on the usage of a particular word about which I had doubts, I used the following rule of thumb: if ten different people from different walks of life in different places were to give me the same answer, I would consider a word to be a Pijin word and would include it in the dictionary. It may not be a very scientific method of investigation, but I leave it to readers to prove me right or wrong. If I erred, it was on the side of conservatism.

Second, I intended to represent the regional variations of the language as much as possible, by recording the regional pronunciations for the same words: for example, bush Kwaio *Fisin* for *Pijin*, Tolo *pinis* for *finis*, etc. As a result, many words are entered more than once in the dictionary, under different spellings, but all refer the reader to the main entry using a standardised spelling. On the other hand it would have been impossible to do justice to the whole range of variation that is found in Pijin. I took into account the most pervasive phonetic rules: apocope (loss of final vowel); deletion of epenthetic (central) vowel; alternation of *p* and *f*, and entered the variable forms that seemed to be the most widespread. It is under the main entry

that one finds the relevant information on a given word. In recognition of the standardisation and literacy path breaking work made by the members of SICA and SITAG over the years, I am following, in most cases, the spelling choices they proposed in their various publications, and most specifically in the 1995 word list produced by Gerry Beimers.

I had originally thought that the dictionary was going to be descriptive, not prescriptive; in other words, that I would simply record meanings and give translations and examples, and not mention usage and other sociolinguistic registers that may be understood as being normative. This proved to be unrealistic, if only because it seemed essential to recognise that Pijin was becoming socially marked, and that linguistic *faux pas* loomed at the horizon of any language learner who was not warned of the various social registers in which some words are used. Following the model set by Terry Crowley in his dictionary of Bislama, the pidgin of Vanuatu, I have resorted to indicating usage whenever relevant, and only for the purpose of supplying additional information, rather than for the purpose of being more normative. By their nature, dictionaries reinforce linguistic norms and usage, if only by spelling out the appropriate context of usage of words. I have made use of such labels, but sparingly: *arch.* (archaic, for the old words); *sl.* (for slang); *urb. Pij.* (urban Pijin), etc.

One of the main features of the dictionary is that it is trilingual: Pijin, English and French. Readers in the Solomon Islands may wonder about the usefulness of having a French translation. This inclusion stems from a few considerations: first, the request made by some Solomon Islanders to have access to French, one of the other languages used in the Pacific; second, the request made by people from New Caledonia, French Polynesia and other French-speaking countries to have access to Pijin, without having to go through English; third, the need to put Melanesian Pidgin (of which Solomon Islands Pijin is a variant) on a par with the two other important languages (in terms of number of speakers) of the Pacific. Therefore, including French in the dictionary along with Pijin and English is as practical as it is symbolic.

Finally, given that languages are part of a cultural world, it seemed important not to limit myself to a simple translation of a Pijin word into English or into French. It was essential to record and talk about cultural practices that are sustained by Pijin, or that can be talked about in Pijin. Whenever possible, I have given substantial information on lifestyles, behaviour, customs, fauna, flora, geography and history, thus transforming the dictionary into a kind of mini encyclopedia. In order to compile all this information, I have made use of a significant body of sources; all of them are listed in the bibliography section, and throughout the dictionary in relevant entries. Despite all this, the dictionary is far from complete, as most speakers of Pijin will be quick to find out. I am hoping that further editions will help improve it, and I will be grateful for any suggestions on how to make it better.

## 1.2 Structure of the dictionary

Besides this introduction, the dictionary comprises the following sections: a brief history of Pijin; the Pijin–English–French dictionary; an English–Pijin finder list; a French–Pijin finder list; and a list of bibliographic references.

Each lexical entry may comprise all or some of the following features: etymology; scientific name; part of speech; usage; English gloss; French gloss; example (translated into English and

French); ethnography, history or geography; synonyms or antonyms; short texts in Pijin with their English and French translation.

### 1.3 Analysis

#### 1.3.1 Reduplication

One feature of Pijin, reduplication, cannot be adequately represented in the dictionary, and accordingly I have not included it. Yet it is an important aspect of the language, that can modify meaning or mood, and for that reason I will describe it briefly here. Reduplication affects adjectives and verbs only in three different ways: reduplication of the whole root and full or partial reduplication of the first syllable.

<i>go</i>	‘go’	<i>gogo</i>	‘after some time’
<i>suim</i>	‘swim’	<i>susuim</i>	‘swim’
<i>dae</i>	‘die’	<i>dadae</i>	‘pine away’.
<i>kala</i>	‘colour’	<i>kalakala</i>	‘multicolour’
<i>fraet</i>	‘afraid’	<i>fafraet</i>	‘very afraid’
<i>krae/karae</i>	‘cry’	<i>kakarae</i>	‘cry continuously’
<i>wan</i>	‘one’	<i>wanwan</i>	‘one at the time’

Reduplication indicates intensity, duration, or repetition of an action. Many speakers make use of it liberally throughout their speech for affect or precision. Reduplication in verbs is formed by repeating the first syllable; reduplication in nouns is obtained by repeating the entire stem. This morphological pattern is found in the Austronesian languages of the Solomon Islands.

#### 1.3.2 Stative verbs vs adjectives

Pijin comprises a large group of words that can be analysed either as stative verbs or as adjectives. Following Keesing (n.d.) and Ross (1999) I have chosen to analyse most of them as statives, keeping the label of adjectives to a small class of words. These are: numerals (both cardinals and ordinals), most of the colour terms, and all other words that can bear the suffix *-fala*. We end up, therefore, with a large class of statives and a small class of adjectives. Note that Beimers (2009) analyses most statives as adjectives.