

**A CONCISE INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY OF THE
MALAGASY LANGUAGE AS
SPOKEN IN IMERINA, PP. 1-116**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649431250

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by W. E. Cousins

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TO THE STUDY OF THE
MALAGASY LANGUAGE

AS SPOKEN IN IMERINA.

BY
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THIRD AND ENLARGED EDITION.

ANTANANARIVO:
PRINTED AT THE PRESS OF THE L.M.S.

1894.

Library of
Gov. Chase & Osborn
1-16-50

PREFACE.

I AM indebted to the kindness of my brother missionaries for the opportunity of publishing this third and enlarged edition of my Grammar. I have long had by me notes collected with a view to such an enlargement. Some of the material, indeed, now used was already in my note books before I wrote the first edition in 1873, but space could not be found for it. In preparing this edition I have separated the Syntax from the account of the various word-forms and their meanings; and I have endeavoured throughout to illustrate and enlarge on such points as experience has shown to cause difficulty to foreigners learning the language. Many points not likely to give trouble to a learner have been passed over more lightly. The main features of the book remain unchanged, and most of the additions are the result of my own observation. But I have taken hints from all quarters, though I could not in every instance exactly define my indebtedness. I would, however, acknowledge my obligation to Mr. H. F. Standing for a series of very interesting notes and suggestions, many of which I have embodied in the book. In some other cases, when I have not adopted Mr. Standing's opinion, I have somewhat modified my own statement. All readers will notice my frequent references to the Annual. The seventeen published numbers of that work contain a mass of information and speculation as to the language, and I have made it my aim to direct attention to the various points discussed. This Introduction is thus to a large extent a key to the philological papers in the Annual, and will I hope facilitate the study of the rich store of material contained therein.

This book is published in the hope that it may prove useful to the missionaries of the next generation, and that they may in due time so advance the study of the language by further study and investigation as to render it obsolete.

Faravohitra,
June 1, 1894.

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A CONCISE INTRODUCTION
TO THE
MALAGASY LANGUAGE.

CHAPTER I.—INTRODUCTION.

THE Malagasy language as spoken in Imerina, to which this book is intended to form an introduction, abounding as it does in open syllables and avoiding all harsh combinations of consonants, is soft and musical in sound, and sufficiently full in vocabulary and rich in grammatical forms to make it a fit instrument not only for ordinary intercourse, but also for the higher uses of instruction and oratory. Any one who listens to the best native speakers, and witnesses their power to sway the minds of their audience, and sees the delight and enthusiasm of the people as they listen to these native orators, skilled as they are in the art of uttering well-chosen and euphonious speech, will never think slightingly of the value and force of the language.

The power of the language is best shown in narration and in description of things apprehended by the senses; and for all purposes of persuasion, teaching, public speaking and preaching, it possesses excellencies of a very high order. The love of the people for proverbs, of which thousands are in common use, has led to the cultivation of a terse antithetic style of speech, which public speakers learn to use with great skill. As specimens of the power of the language, even in a translation, may be adduced some of the stories of the Old Testament and the Book of Proverbs, in the Malagasy Bible; these are generally acknowledged to possess both force and beauty.

The natives are justly proud of their language; and those foreigners who gain a sufficient hold of it to master its many delicate distinctions, and to appreciate its force, yield to it an ungrudging admiration. But whilst we admire the language for its many excellencies, and cannot withhold our wonder that such a fulness and variety of grammatical forms should have been developed and preserved through so many generations without the aid of writing, we do not shut our eyes on the other hand to its defects and weaknesses. These consist mainly in a want of general terms and of words suitable for anything requiring scientific precision. In treating of scientific subjects most of the *technical*

terms have to be introduced. But this need not surprise us; our own language has been borrowing in this manner for generations, as the analysis of a few paragraphs of any scientific work will abundantly prove.

My purpose in writing this Introduction is to help missionaries and others to obtain a fairly complete knowledge of the main features of the language, and to enable them so to master its grammatical forms and leading principles that they may be able with ease to analyse the words they meet in conversation or reading, and to use the language with freedom and accuracy. One entering on the study of the language cannot do better than use Mr. Richardson's "Malagasy for Beginners," working out carefully the exercises there given; but after the first steps have been taken, I hope this book will afford to many useful aid in their further studies.

One thing should be impressed on the minds of all who wish to gain a mastery of the language and to use it with freedom, viz. that they must not trust simply to what they can learn from books, or they will acquire but a stiff and bookish style of speaking. On the other hand, it is equally certain that if they are contented to pick up the language by ear only, though they may gain facility in speaking, they will lack accuracy and precision. Careful study of the grammar should go hand in hand with free intercourse with the natives.

A beginner should give his main strength during the first year or two to the thorough mastery of the grammar. He should from the outset endeavour as far as possible to avoid forming sentences on English models; and especially should he direct his attention to those points in which the Malagasy language differs so much from his own; e.g. in the absence of the logical copula and the consequent difference in the formation of sentences, the common use of the passive, the peculiarities of the relative form, the way in which the agent of an adjunctive verb is expressed, the uses of the particle *na*, delicate distinctions in the use or omission of the article, etc. If these and similar things are firmly grasped at the outset, a good foundation will exist on which to build. On the other hand, the failure to recognise some of these peculiar features of the language, may lead one to adopt awkward and erroneous modes of expression from which it may be extremely difficult to free oneself in after years.

For correct pronunciation the learner should rely entirely on the natives, and never be content to learn from a foreigner. No length of time spent in the island seems enough to make us speak just as the natives do; and pronunciation learned in this way is but a copy of a copy. At the same time let us remember that there are among the Malagasy (as among ourselves) both careful and careless speakers; and in the early days of one's study it is of great importance to have the guidance of some one who has a good pronunciation and is generally accurate in his use of the language. Many country people, bearers, and others, are but poor guides; and those addicted to the use of tobacco have often an indistinct and disagreeable pronunciation. The better class natives are often heard to complain that foreigners are too ready to pick up phrases from their bearers and servants—a practice which, if not checked, leads at times to the use by persons of education

and refinement in other matters of phrases analogous to what might be acquired in England by carefully copying the select expressions heard among railway porters, cabmen, etc.

Idiom is no less important than pronunciation, and we should never lose sight of the distinction between grammatical and idiomatic composition. We may write or utter sentences strictly accurate, so far as grammatical analogy can be our guide, and yet be using forms or phrases which no native would employ. Often in Bible Revision work I wrote sentences which seemed accurate, and did not set at defiance any law of grammar, but which my native helpers would not allow to pass. It will be found comparatively easy to write or speak grammatically; but nothing but long and free intercourse with the natives, and careful and constant listening to the best speakers, will give one a command of easy and idiomatic speech.

In this introductory chapter some general information about the language will be given; but as most of the points to be noticed have been dealt with in the pages of the Antananarivo Annual (a work which will be in the hands of most of those who use this book), I shall content myself with giving only the main facts, adding at the same time references to the papers in the Annual, where fuller information may be found.

There are five principal points on which information may be given:—

I.—What Europeans have done to promote the study and use of the Malagasy language.

Soon after the discovery of Madagascar at the beginning of the sixteenth century (1506) by Dom Francisco de Almeida, the Portuguese Viceroy of India (A.A.* i. 401), travellers began to write accounts of the island, and some of them collected vocabularies of the language.

The earliest vocabularies of which I have seen any notice are those of Frederick de Houtman (A.A. ii. 16, 17) and Corneille van Heemskerck. These were both published at Amsterdam in 1603. The former was one of the vocabularies used by Marsden in writing his essay "On the Polynesian or East Insular Languages" (A.A. ii. 105); and the words contained in it were given in the Dutch, Malay, and Malagasy languages. (For a specimen see A.A. ii. 17.)

Six years later (1609) was published a small book, in Dutch, by Hieronymus Megiserus, giving some account of Madagascar, with a "Dictionary and Dialogues," filling 105 pages.

Another vocabulary used by Marsden bears the name of Cauche, and is dated 1638. It contained "*Colloque entre le Madagascarois et le Francois sur les choses plus necessaires pour se faire entendre et être entendu d'eux*," filling 18 pp.

In 1658 a Dictionary was published by Flacourt, who was for some years Governor of the French settlement at Fort Dauphine, and whose great work on Madagascar has been a mine from which later writers have freely dug. An account of Flacourt's Dictionary, and of a small catechism also bearing his name, will be found in the Annual (ii. 18).

* A. A. is used throughout for Antananarivo Annual.

Next in order comes the very valuable list of more than 500 Malagasy words given as an appendix to "Robert Drury's Journal." This list should be studied in the edition annotated by the Rev. J. Richardson, whose knowledge of Betsileo helped him in many of his identifications (A.A. i. 102-111).

In 1773 a French-Malagasy and Malagasy-French vocabulary was published in Mauritius by an author named Challan (A.A. iv. 17).

About the years 1815 and 1816 some voluminous works on the language and customs of the people of Madagascar were compiled by Huet de Froberville. I cannot find any proof that these works were ever printed; but the manuscripts themselves filling 25 folio volumes (numbered *Add.* 1817-1841) are carefully preserved in the Manuscript Room of the British Museum. A short account of these manuscripts is contained in the *ANNUAL* (iv. 65-72).

In Dumont D'Urville's account of the *Voyage of the Astrolabe* (Paris, 1833) is contained a very full vocabulary, taken it seems in the main from de Froberville. Any one wishing to obtain in a concise and accessible form material for estimating the knowledge of the Malagasy language already possessed by Europeans before the founding of the L.M.S. Mission in Antananarivo in 1820 could not do better than consult this clearly printed abstract by Dumont D'Urville, comparing it, if possible, with the Vocabularies of Challan and Flacourt, on which so much of it rests. When the information it contains differs from these, we may generally conclude that de Froberville's manuscripts were the source from which the author drew.

A French Roman Catholic Mission was established in the district of Fort Dauphine in the middle of the seventeenth century, and was maintained for about 18 years (1648-1666). In connection with this Mission was published the small catechism mentioned above as bearing Flacourt's name. Short specimens of the style of this book may be found in the article in the *Annual* already referred to.

When the first missionary of the L.M.S. (the Rev. D. Jones) reached Antananarivo in 1820 he found no knowledge of letters among the people generally; but there were a few ("not more than six persons") who could write Malagasy in Arabic letters. For some time after the arrival of the missionaries it seemed doubtful whether King Radama I. would decide in favour of the Arabic or of the Roman alphabet. The Roman happily triumphed.

The form in which the language is written to-day is with slight modifications that adopted by the early missionaries of the L.M.S. On this question I would refer to what I have already said in the *ANNUAL* (iv. 65 and 72).

The work of educating and enlightening the Malagasy has proceeded apace; and now from not less than seven printing offices there are flowing forth constant streams of literature in the native language. Thirty octavo pages of Mr. Sibree's "Madagascar Bibliography" (Antananarivo, 1885) are required simply to calendar the titles of the books that had been issued up to the date of its publication; and from that work may be gained a fair idea of what missionaries and others have been doing to lay the foundations of a Malagasy literature.