

**ROTUMAN LANGUAGE LESSONS**

**PREPARED BY**

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**Introduction.** These lessons are being prepared in order to help overseas Rotumans who either do not know the language or feel they do not know it well enough. It is hoped that these lessons will be a first step toward the maintenance of the Rotuman language and culture into the next century and beyond. Please consider this Lesson 1 to be a draft only. Feel free to give a copy to anyone who might be interested. Feedback is welcome. Please send your comments to: Marit Vamarasi, 3538 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60203, U.S.A. Or e-mail to: m-vamarasi@neiu.edu.

**Instructions.** These lessons are meant to be used with a native speaker, who can read the Rotuman and provide a pronunciation model to the learner. For that reason, there is not much information about pronunciation here. (Eventually, we would like to put these on CD-ROM, but this more traditional style of lesson is an important first step.)

The boldface items in the dialogue indicate that those words and structures will be explained in the Grammar section which follows. The lines in the Dialogue are numbered so they can easily be referred to in the Grammar Section.

I have tried to follow the Rotuman writing system where the symbols are available on my computer keyboard. Instead of the macron (the line that goes over vowels to indicate length) I have reduplicated the letter.

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## ROTUMAN LESSON #1

1. Person A: Noa'ia ko **hāntei**, **ka 'āe** taptapen?  
*Hi, dear, how are you?*
2. Person B: Fāi'ākse'ea **ka gou** ne'ne' lelei, **ka** tapen 'āe?  
*Thanks, I'm fine, and how are you?*
3. A: **Gou** ne'ne' lelei tape'ma. Av roa het **gou kat** rāe-rāe **ra se 'āe**.  
*I'm fine too. I haven't seen you for a long time.*
4. B: Kota ho'i-m, ko **hāntei**.  
*I just got back.*
5. A: '**E** tei? **Ka 'āe** la' **se** hanua?  
*From where? Did you go abroad?*
6. B: **Gou** la' ma ās **se 'oto** rāi' **ta 'e** Setnē.  
*I went to visit my children in Sydney.*
7. A: 'Uh tauag, **ka** tapen **iris**?  
*No wonder. And how are they?*
8. B: Fāi'ākse'ea **ka iris** ne'ne' lelei tape'ma. '**Oto** hān folu 'inos 'atakoa, **ka 'oto** fā haharāg **ta** rak la' mo. ö'-fā **ta** ne'ne' tape'ma.  
*Thank you, they are well too. My three daughters are all married, but my youngest son is still in school. Dad is well too.*
9. A: Gagaja noa'ia. '**Oto** fā **ta** tae 'e Lapanoni.  
*Thank God. My husband is in Lebanon.*
10. B: **Ka ia** la' ma roa?  
*Did he go long ago?*
11. A: Fau-t 'el la pō.  
*Close to a year.*
12. B: Noa'ia ma '**itar** ōr se', **ka gou** la' la hoa'-kia '**oto** 'af **ta 'e** 'ofes ne 'Ea Pasifiak **ta**.  
*It's been good to talk to you, but I'm going to take my bag from the Air Pacific office.*
13. A: Lelei, '**itar** la ōr hoi'āk. '**āe** tāla la'-au?  
*Good. We'll chat again. Good-bye.*
14. B: 'I, '**āe** tāla fu'u-ou.  
*Good-bye.*

## Grammar Notes

- The word *hāntei*, glossed in 1 as ‘dear’, is related to the word *hāni*; both mean ‘woman’ or ‘wife’. Hence, this expression could only be directed to a female.
- The conjunction *ka* is sometimes translated as ‘and’ (2, 7), sometimes as ‘but’ (12), but usually it is best left untranslated into English (1, 5, 8). In 5 and 10 *ka* functions as a sort of question marker.
- Rotuman has a 2-part negative; *kat* (or *kal* in the future) goes before the verb or adjective ; *ra* follows the verb or adjective (3). The *ra* part sometimes follows a postverbal adverb. For example, *hoi’āk* ‘again’ and *ma roa* ‘for a long time’ both occur before the *ra* part of the negative.
- Rotuman has a set of 3 verbal suffixes that are called ‘directionals’ which indicate the direction of the action expressed by the verb in relation to the speaker. The suffix *-m* (seen in 4) shows that the action is toward the speaker. The suffix *-of(o)* is used for actions away from the speaker.
- Prepositions often differ greatly between languages. In this conversation, you see examples of three Rotuman prepositions: *se* (3, 5, 6), in each case translated as ‘to’ or, with some verbs, it requires no English translation; *e* (5, 6, 9, 12), translated as either ‘at’, ‘in’, or ‘from’; and *ne* ‘of’ (12). In most cases, the context will determine which meaning a certain preposition has.
- One cannot speak a language without using pronouns. In this conversation you see several pronouns being used: *’āe*, meaning ‘you’ (singular only) (1, 2, 4, 14); *gou* ‘I, me’ (2, 5, 12), *iris* ‘they, them’ (7, 8), *ia* ‘he, she’ (10); and *itar* ‘we two’ (13, 14). The possessive pronoun for ‘my’ is *’oto* (6, 8, 9, 12).
- The article *ta* occurs at the end of a singular noun phrase and means something like ‘the’. See examples in 6, 8, 9, and 12. The other article, meaning ‘a’, is the suffix *-t* or the particle *het*, both of which follow the last word of a noun phrase (11).
- Intransitive verbs (that is, those that do not take a direct object) often have suffixes which indicate who is the subject. In 13 you see an example of the ‘you’ suffix (*-au*) and in 14 an example of the ‘I’ suffix (*-ou*). The verb *la* ‘go’ is one that often takes these subject suffixes.
- Past, present, and future tenses are not indicated by affixes on Rotuman verbs. Rather, when tense is expressed at all, it is expressed by a preverbal particle. In this dialogue you see future indicated by *la* (13) and *tāla* (13, 14).

**Useful Vocabulary Words and Expressions. Try to memorize these.**

Noa'ia	Hello. Hi.
Fai'akse'ea.	Thank you.
'äe taptapen/tapen 'äe?	How are you?
Gou ne'ne'( lelei).	I'm fine.
Av roa het gou kat räeräe ra se 'äe. Av roa het gou kat räeräe ra se 'äe	It's been a long time since I last saw you. a long time I haven't seen you
Gagaja noa'ia.	Thank God.
Noa'ia ma 'itar òr se'.	It's been good to chat (with you).
'Itar la òr hoi'äk.	Let's chat again.
'äe täla la'-au?	Good-bye. (Literally, will you go?). This is said only to the one who is leaving.
'äe täla fu'u-ou.	Good-bye. (Literally, you will stay). This is said only to the one who is staying.

**Exercises on Grammar and Vocabulary. Answers follow in the next section.**

1. Practice Rotuman negatives by negating the following sentences. Give the meanings of the new sentences.

- Ia la' ma roa.
- 'Oto fā ta ne'ne'.
- 'Itar la òr hoi'äk.
- 'Oto hān ta 'inos.
- Gou la' se hanua.

2. Fill in the correct prepositions. Choose from *se*, *'e* and *ne*.

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| a. 'äe leum ____ tei?                   | 'Where are you from?'              |
| b. 'äe la' ____ tei?                    | 'Where are you going?'             |
| c. Gou la la' ____ 'ofes ta.            | 'I am going to the office.'        |
| d. Ia hoa'kia 'on 'af ta ____ 'ofes ta. | 'He took his bag from the office.' |
| e. famör ____ 'oto hanue ta             | 'people of my land'                |
| f. Gou kat räe ra ____ 'äe.             | 'I didn't see you.'                |

3. Give the correct Rotuman for the following noun phrases, paying special attention to the articles. (Remember that there is no article with plural nouns.)

- a. a year
- b. the year
- c. the father
- d. an office
- e. my husband
- f. my youngest daughter
- g. my three daughters
- h. a bag

4. Match the terms for family members.

- |             |         |
|-------------|---------|
| a. mother   | ö'fā    |
| b. son      | o'honi  |
| c. father   | rāi'    |
| d. daughter | le' fā  |
| e. children | le' hån |

#### Answers to Exercises

- |    |                              |                               |
|----|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. | a. Ia kat la' ma roa ra.     | 'He/she did not go long ago.' |
|    | b. 'Oto fā ta kat ne'ne' ra. | 'My husband is not well.'     |
|    | c. 'Itar kal ōr hoi'āk ra.   | 'We won't chat again.'        |
|    | d. 'Oto hån ta kat 'inos ra. | 'My daughter is not married.' |
|    | e. Gou kat la' ra se hanua.  | 'I didn't go abroad.'         |
| 2. | a. 'e                        |                               |
|    | b. se                        |                               |
|    | c. se                        |                               |
|    | d. 'e                        |                               |
|    | e. ne                        |                               |
|    | f. se                        |                               |
| 3. | a. faut                      |                               |
|    | b. fau ta                    |                               |
|    | c. ö' fā ta                  |                               |
|    | d. ofes het                  |                               |
|    | e. 'oto fā ta                |                               |
|    | f. 'oto hån haharág ta       |                               |
|    | g. 'oto hån folu             |                               |
|    | h. 'af het                   |                               |
| 4. | a. o'honi                    |                               |
|    | b. le' fā                    |                               |
|    | c. ö'fā                      |                               |
|    | d. le' hån                   |                               |
|    | e. rāi'                      |                               |