

Foundations of Bislama

A practical grammar guide for learners, travellers, and cultural immersion

Language Learners Hub

Introduction

Bislama is a creole language spoken across Vanuatu, used daily by people from hundreds of different language backgrounds.

This guide explains how Bislama actually works — clearly, accurately, and without forcing English grammar onto it.

How Bislama Sentences Work

Bislama follows a Subject–Verb–Object structure, similar to English, but without verb conjugation.

Mi go long maket. — I go to the market.

Verbs in Bislama

Verbs do not change for tense, person, or number. Meaning is shaped by particles and context.

Tense and Aspect Markers

Common markers include **bin** (past), **bae** (future), and **stap** (ongoing).

In rural speech, these markers are often dropped when context is clear.

Plurals and Subject Markers

Plurality is shown using subject markers such as **oli**, **yumi**, and **mifala**.

Possession

Possession is shown using **blong**, which can also imply social responsibility in rural contexts.

Negation

Negation uses **no** or **nogat**, often softened by tone and context.

Questions

Questions rely on intonation and question words such as **hu**, **wanem**, and **we**.

Rural Usage Notes

Rural Bislama often omits tense markers, relies on implied meaning, and reflects indigenous language influence.

Ethical Note

This guide is descriptive, not prescriptive, and respects Bislama as a living language shaped by its speakers.