

Malagasy Language*

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1 Origin

Even though, Madagascar is part of the Africa continent, our language is not among the African languages groups. All materials I read reveal that Malagasy language belongs to the *Austronesian* family, which includes Indonesian and Malayo-Polynesian languages. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the closest language to Malagasy is the language called *Maanjan* spoken in southern Borneo.

Why? Because, according to researchers and historians, the first Malagasy were immigrants from Indonesia and southern Asia who came to Madagascar in about fourth century A.D. Some words of modern Malagasy are also adopted from French, Arabic, African, Dutch as well as English. It is partly because of the European pirates and traders who were sailing back and forth to the island between the 16th and 19th centuries.

2 Malagasy Alphabet

We have 21 letters in our alphabet. All letters are similar to those in English alphabet except C, Q, U, W, and X, which are not used in our language. However, the pronunciation is not identical to that of English alphabet.

3 How to Speak Like a Malagasy?

Malagasy pronunciation is not really difficult. Here are some basic rules.

- The letters “tr,” “ts,” and “dr” are special in Malagasy language. When you find them in any Malagasy word, you should pronounce them together but not one by one. For instance, when you pronounce my name *Manitra* or the word *tranofalafa* you should neither pronounce the “tr” as in the

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Spanish word *trabajo* nor in the French *travail*, whereas it should be pronounced about the same—but not exactly—as in the English word *travel*. This rule is maintainable for the letters “ts” and “dr.”

- The letter “o” is pronounced as in “too” or “zoo” but not as in “love” or “rote.”
- The letter “i” is pronounced as in “infinite” but not as in “finite.”
- When we Malagasy speak, we do not pronounce some vowel especially the “a” at the end of a word. For instance, the “i” and the “a” at the end of my name *Manitra* are not pronounced.

I hope that you can now pronounce my name correctly. For more information about Malagasy language, please try the links below.

Sources used in creating this handout:

The First Malagasy,
<http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/17/regions/17CCAC01.html>
History of Madagascar,
<http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/iiasn7/iswa/ellis.html>
The word of Jesus: Malagasy,
<http://www.thewords.com/translations/malagasy.htm>

For more references on Malagasy language, please try the links below:

References on Malagasy Language and Linguistics,
<http://folk.uio.no/janengh/gassisk>
Guide to Communication in Madagascar,
<http://members.aol.com/IPubs/guide.html>