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A Neutral Universal Language



suma

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by
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Third Edition

B. RUSSELL
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INTRODUCTION

Suma was designed to be neutral, easy, and practical. In order to be neutral the words should be neither borrowed nor derived from any other language, but they should be especially designed to be easy to speak and easy to spell. The Suma words are short and the consonants alternate with vowels: suma te kana nato sako (Suma be easy world language). A small number of Suma words are not completely neutral: foto(photograph); kino(cinema) from German "Kino"; dea (of) from the French "de"; etc.

In order to be easy the universal language should have a short vocabulary and a simple grammar. Suma is limited to a maximum of 2000 basic words. At present it has about 1000 basic words, excluding proper names and chemical formulas.

In order to further reduce the number of basic words to be learned, Suma uses a simple system to associate word pairs that are relatively easy to associate, such as good/bad, boy/girl, table/chair, dog/cat, rain/snow, etc. Once you learn a word pair in your native language, you need only learn one Suma word in order to learn two Suma words. Since more than 250 word pairs are used, it is important to explain this unique feature of Suma in this introduction. The Suma alphabet begins with the five vowels which have the following sequence: a, i, u, o, e. The first two vowels "a/i" and the last two vowels "o/e" are used in the first vowel of a word pair to associate the Suma words. Here are some a/i word pairs: pamo/pimo(man/woman); kamo/kimo(dog/cat); kana/kina(easy/difficult); kavi/kivi(laugh/cry). Here are some o/e word pairs: poma/pema(good/bad); von/veni(open/close); soto/seto(rain/snow). In only a few cases is the sequence of the words in a word pair somewhat difficult to remember, but as soon as one member of a word pair has been learned then the sequence is no longer a problem.

In addition to the use of the first vowel to associate word pairs, Suma also uses the terminal vowel to associate other types of related meanings: bato(table) yields bate(furniture); gimo(sand) yields gime(glass). The use of the terminal vowel does not follow any specific rules but the resultant words are easy to learn.

Another aid to easy learning of the basic vocabulary is the use of the terminal vowel to indicate the part of speech. Thus all verbs end in i: kosi(give); all adjectives end in a or u: poma(good); all nouns end in o or e: vino(wine); etc. Of course, there are some exceptions because Suma is a "practical" language.

The grammar of Suma has been made very simple without loss of clarity. There are no articles, but there is a simple device for expressing the articles if it is necessary. There are no plural inflections because it is simple to express the plural by the use of such words as tama(all), pota(many), tusa(these), or the numerals. There are two auxiliary verbs to express the past and future tenses respectively, but these auxiliaries are only used when the tense is not clear; ma oki mi pigo temo(I see you back day) clearly means: "I saw you yesterday". There are no complex tenses; these are expressed by context: asa mi te mora pigo temo, isa mi oki mu (if you be here back day, then you see he) is easily translated into: "If you had been here yesterday then you would have seen him."

There are no accusative or possessive inflections. The accusative is expressed by position: ma oki mu (I see him); mu oki ma (He sees me). The possessive case is expressed by the preposition dea(of): papo dea ma(father of I) my father.

There are only nine true affixes (1 prefix and 8 suffixes). All the other affixes are expressed by independent words. The use of these affixes and the formation of compound words yields an adequate vocabulary to translate the entire scientific and technical vocabulary of a modern language.

The word order is simple, but the adverbs and prepositional phrases have a relatively free word order. A few exceptions to the rules of word order were necessary in the case of interrogative sentences and relative clauses, in which the accusative precedes the subject.

In order to make Suma a practical language I have followed the linguistic principles of natural languages. The use of one word for many meanings (principle of multiplicity of meaning) is common to all natural languages. It is easier to learn several meanings for one word than to learn a different word for each meaning.

Natural languages also use the principle of omission of parts of a word or phrase in clear context. Thus in English we can say "phone" for "telephone" and "polio" for "poliomyelitis". In Suma this principle of omission is used frequently because Suma has many compound words which would be clumsy if the full form were to be used all the time. In textbooks on anatomy one might often refer to the "femoral artery" by the short form, fito kasa (leg red) instead of the full form, fito kasa tobo vuso (leg red blood tube).

All natural languages have idioms, which are here defined as constructions or patterns that do not correspond with equivalent expressions in another language. Suma has tried to keep its idioms as regular as possible. If you learn the idiom kape pemi (head ache) which means "I have a headache" you can easily use the same pattern to describe all other aches: deno pemi (tooth ache) means "I have a tooth ache"; tene pemi (abdomen ache) means "I have a belly ache."

To be practical Suma must have a way to permit the use of foreign words and names. It will take a long time to complete the Suma dictionary. Therefore Suma has adopted English as a temporary international language for those words that cannot be found in the Suma dictionary. When using an English word or proper name always write the entire word or name in capital letters: ma soki PENICILLIN te sama poma vogo (I think penicillin is a very good drug).

There have been several changes in Suma grammar and vocabulary since the second edition of Suma in 1958. There is now only one form of the possessive instead of two. There are now two auxiliary verbs for tense which was formerly expressed only by context. These auxiliary verbs are however used only in isolated or ambiguous context. We have added the infinitive particle which enables us to make many compound words consisting of verb plus verb. The terminal vowel of many nouns did not end in o or e in the previous edition; now most nouns end in o or e. The use of the terminal a with proper nouns of geographical names is still an exception: enga (England). Finally we have added the use of capital letters for untranslated proper names or foreign words.

A final word of advice to the reader: please read the table of contents in order to have an idea of where to look for the answers to your many questions.

GRAMMAR

1. Alphabet: 5 vowels and 14 consonants in the following order:

a, i, u, o, e, b, d, f, g, k, l, m, n, p,
r, s, t, v, z

The "foreign" letters follow after "z":

c, h, j, q, w, x, y

There is no single standard of pronunciation. Each nation will use their native pronunciation. The pronunciation is approximately as follows:

a father
i nⁱce
u true
o go
e they

g go
s so

The remaining consonants are pronounced approximately as in English.

The names of the letters are formed by adding "i" to the consonants:

bi, di, fi, gi, ki, etc

The names of the foreign letters all add "e" except "q"; the name for "y" is arbitrary:

c(tse), h(he), j(zhe), q(ku),
w(ve), x(se), y(pe)

The stress or accent always falls on the first vowel of a word; there are no diphthongs and each vowel is pronounced separately.

Capital letters are used in proper names that have not yet been transcribed, (MAINE), in chemical formulas, (CO₂), and in any word that is written in normal English, because it was not in the Suma dictionary, (ISOTOPE).

2. Articles: There are none. The indefinite article "a" or "an" is understood unless otherwise indicated:

kato lati kamo a boy has a dog

The definite article "the" is often expressed by tu (this) or tusa (these):

tu kato the boy
tusa kato the boys

If necessary the indefinite article may be expressed by the numeral 1:

1 kato a boy

3. Plural: by plural modifiers or by context:

2 kato two boys
tusa kato these boys
tama kato all boys
tima kato no boys
tuma kato some boys
pota kato many boys
peta kato few boys
daro dea kato group of boys
1 dea kato one of the boys

sia lati mosa deno she has
beautiful teeth (not "tooth")

The word "these" is translated by "this" if the plural is shown by other words:

tusa kato these boys
tu 3 kato these three boys

4. Possessive: by the preposition dea (of):

kamo dea kato a boy's dog
kamo dea ma my dog
kamo dea papo dea ma my
father's dog

The plural often requires the word tusa (these):

tusa moke dea ma my friends
tusa moke dea tusa kato the

boys' friends

The possessive pronouns "mine", "yours", etc. are expressed by dea (of):

tu te dea ma this is mine

The preposition dea also denotes a verb-object relationship:

tuni puto dea roma the burning of Rome
tosu puto dea papo love for a father

An English possessive sometimes denotes agency, in which case it is expressed by fone(by):

tuni puto dea roma fone nero
Nero's burning of Rome

The possessive words "my" and "your" are often omitted in clear context:

kape pemi (my) head aches
vonu lobo! open (your) book

Note: The possessive of the interrogative and relative pronouns precedes the thing possessed, in order to introduce the function of these words to the reader early in the sentence:

dea pavo lobo? whose book?
dea sio devo te whose name is

5. Dative: by the preposition ale(to); the dative normally precedes the accusative but it may follow the accusative if we add a separator:

ma kosi lobo ale mu I give him a book
ma kosi ale mu tu lobo

The preposition ile(from) follows the same pattern:

ma kesi lobo ile mu I take a book from him

6. Accusative: is expressed by position after the verb or a preposition:

ma oki mu I see him
mu oki ma he sees me
ale ma to me
fone mu by him

The relative and interrogative pronouns in the accusative case precede the subject:

pamo, sio mi oki the man whom you see
pavo mi oki? whom do you see?
pivo mi liti? what do you want?

7. Tense: is usually indicated by the context:

ma oki mi pigo temo I saw you yesterday
ma oki mi pago temo I will see you tomorrow

There are two auxiliary verbs for tense, sati(did) and siti(will); these auxiliaries are only used when necessary:

ma sati tomi (I did go) I went
ma siti tomi (I will go) I will go

In the absence of adequate context the present tense is always understood:

ma momi lobo I am reading a book
pamo keni the man is dying

The following verbs differ from English in pattern:

ma sati kami tomi (I did can go) I was able to go
ma sati aki tomi (I did must go) I had to go
ma sati iki tomi (I did should go) I should have gone
ma siti kami (I will can) I will be able to
ma siti aki (I will must) I will have to

9. Imperative: by omitting the subject and adding an exclamation mark:

temi mora! come here
kuma miti! please sit down

In the first and third persons we use sui(let):

sui ma tati tu! let me do it
sui mu tati tu! let him do it

Note the following idiomatic imperatives:

sui kogo koni! long live the king
sui meke keni! death to the enemy
sui devo dea mi te sovi! blessed be thy name

10. Passive: is expressed by te (be) plus a verb:

ma te oki I am seen
mu te deni fone kamo he was bitten by a dog
me te kovi ale koso he was killed in the war

11. Transitive verbs: All Suma verbs are both transitive and intransitive without change unless they are marked "vi"(verb intransitive) in the dictionary:

ma tosi (intransitive) I am in love
ma tosi mi (trans) I love you
bane puti (trans) milk;(intran) lactate

When an intransitive verb is compounded with a preposition it becomes transitive:

ma tomi ona mi I go with you
ma ona tomi mi I accompany you

An intransitive verb may sometimes be made transitive by adding the suffix puti (en):

In the following example note that only one auxiliary is used to set the basic tense of the entire paragraph:

papo dea ma sati lati kamo. tu kamo keni. isa papo poti sute sita tosa mu sami kamo.

Literal translation: Father of I did have dog. This dog die. Then father speak that never again he buy dog.

Free translation: My father had a dog. The dog died. Then my father said that he would never again buy another dog.

8. Infinitive: is expressed by the particle to(to):

ma liti to tomi I want to go

The particle to is omitted after kami(can), aki(must), iki(should) and sui(let):

ma kami tomi I can go
ma aki tomi I must go
ma iki tomi I should go
ma sui mu tomi I let him go

The accusative with infinitive is correct in Suma, but it may also be translated by a clause:

ma liti mu to tomi I want him to go
ma liti sute mu tomi I want that he (should) go

ma tami tu to te mola I know this to be true
ma tami sute tu te mola I know that this is true

The infinitive construction may be used after a noun instead of using a prepositional phrase:

nade to sidi suma (way to learn suma) how to learn Suma
nade dea sidi puto dea suma (way of learn ment of Suma)

