

THE PALINDROMES OF MANGAREVA

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Mangareva is the largest of the Gambier Islands, a small group situated within the Tuamotu Archipelago in the eastern Pacific. The islands were discovered by Captain Wilson of the 'Duff' on 25 May 1797, and he named them after the British naval commander Admiral Lord Gambier.

Mangareva Island is about five miles in length, and rises in two peaks in the form of wedges, the greatest height being 1315 feet. The population was 516 in 1967, according to Webster's New Geographical Dictionary. The other chief islands in the Gambier group are Akamaru, Aukena, and Taravai. They form part of the French possessions in Oceania, and are almost enclosed by a coral reef 40 miles in circumference.

The interesting matter to the linguist and anthropologist is that the language is pure Polynesian. Generally the inhabitants of the Tuamotu Archipelago speak a dialect containing some elements foreign to the Polynesian tongue, but on Mangareva the speech is nearly identical with the Maori of New Zealand, thousands of miles distant to the westward. This raises some thought-provoking theories; however, my field is logology, not anthropology.

The definitive Dictionary of Mangareva was compiled by Edward Tregear, and published by the New Zealand Government Printing Office in 1899. It contains around 7000 words, of which well over one per cent are palindromic. This is an amazingly high proportion of palindromes, but even more remarkable is the fact that eleven of them contain nine or more letters! Many Mangareva words, even short ones, have most colourful definitions. Judge for yourself: here are the 86 palindromes of Mangareva.

AA to utter an exclamation, to admire, to look at eagerly

EE a saw

UU to break wind

AEA when? (used only with the future)

AGA a fathom (six feet)

AHA the mouth

AIA see there! forward then! courage!

AKA to make or cause

AMA the outrigger of a canoe

ANA a sinking down or falling of the ground

AOA condolence with one who grieves

APA to take possession of

- ARA to miss one's mark, as in throwing a stone
 ATA the shadow of a human being
 AVA slipped from the memory
 EHE to lose one's way
 EIE behold! see there!
 EKE the octopus or squid
 ERE to march, walk, go
 ETE to be afraid
 IKI a strip, as of ribbon
 INI to recite a prayer, lesson, etc.
 IRI placed in a higher position than the observer
 ITI anything which jumps
 IVI family, genealogy
 OHO the head (of a human being)
 OKO to tie a number of coconuts together
 OMO to suck at the breast
 ONO to put end to end
 OPO to entertain, to converse with a person
 ORO to eat one's words
 OTO a venomous bone arming the point of a lance
 UHU to gather fruit or berries without breaking them from the stalk
 UMU a black-colored fish thick in proportion to its length
 UNU a piece of wood on which one throws himself into the sea
 URU to cry out on account of the presence of a god
 UTU an emergency or crisis

 AEAEA to breathe with difficulty
 AHAHA to do for the first time
 AKAKA an unusually low tide
 AMAMA to make a grimace by opening the mouth
 APAPA the gable end of a house
 ARARA quarrels, faults
 ARORA a kind of licentious chant
 ATOTA you will be taken! you will be caught!
 ATUTA the suburbs or extension of a chief town
 AUAUA having many possessions
 AVAVA the name of a portion of a reef
 EKEKE loud, strong: said of a fine voice
 ERURE a term of endearment used as a call to one's eldest daughter
 ETETE plural form of ETE
 IRIRI to roll oneself, tumble, wallow
 ORORO a curse, or a cry of welcome
 URURU to catch in the teeth (said of food)
 UTUTU to moan concerning a person's death

 AGAAGA work
 ANAANA suffocating heat
 ATAATA to be full of matter, said of a sore ripe for lancing
 AVAAVA smoking tobacco
 EKEEKE reduced by boiling
 EREERE to go without ceasing, or to tie carefully
 INIINI plural form of INI
 IRIRI pleasant

lVIIVI small hills
 OKOOKO to revenge oneself
 OMOOMO to suck
 ONOONO the shreds of pandanus used in making a mat
 OPOOPO to think about some uncompleted work
 OROORO to wash or rub (plural form)
 UNUUNU to mark with wood a place one does not wish crowded
 URUURU the hair on the body
 UTUUTU to mourn, bewail

AKAHAKA having large and distended nostrils
 AKAPAKA to cook so that the surface of the food forms a crust
 AKATAKA to rough-hew a piece of timber using only one hand

AKAHAHAKA to listen attentively
 AMAMAMAMA chewing actions
 ARERARERA the name of a fish
 ARORARORA to sing joyfully to oneself (plural form)
 ARURARURA to mock anyone who is speaking
 ATOTATOTA red, scarlet
 AVAAVAAVA one who hinders or delays much
 EKAKEKAKE waves of the sea going and coming on the beach

AKAMAKAMAKA to commence to ripen
 AKAPAKAPAKA to season or ripen (said of timber placed in water)
 AKATAKATAKA to fish all day or all night with the line (plural)

My favourite palindrome? The nod goes to EKAKEKAKE.