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## **A grammar of Ik (Icé-tód) : Northeast Uganda's last thriving Kuliak language**

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# A grammar of Ik (Icé-tód)

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# A grammar of Ik (Icé-tód)

Northeast Uganda's last thriving Kuliak language

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Main)  
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To my parents, Arlin & Velma:

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Mom, for showing how to learn the world with love and wonder.

And both, for taking a young boy to Africa long ago...



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---

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*In Memory of:*

Lochiyo Gax Gabriel (197?-2011)

Lopuwa Paul (198?-2014)

*Ik friends whose lives were cut short by sickness*

## Foreword

---

This book contains *a* grammar of Ik, not *the* grammar. It is really just a ‘state of knowledge’ report of one individual non-Ik linguist at one point in history. Of the many topics covered in the following pages, some are no doubt incorrectly analyzed, while others could probably have been correctly analyzed in more than one way. And then, of course, the ways of phrasing the descriptions of each linguistic entity number to infinity.

Trying to capture the grammar of a living language linearly on paper is a little like photographing an elusive wild animal. As it darts through the underbrush, you snap your photo. What the photo captures is true: the shape and contours of the animal, its color and patterns, its mode of movement. But as true as the photo may be, it in no way does justice to the living beast. In the same way, a written grammar can trace the structural features of a language: its phonemes, morphemes, syntactic structures. But seen in light of the living language in use, the grammar pales in comparison. Even after completing this project, all I have to do is walk through the neighborhood, overhear a conversation, or attend a public function to learn something totally new about the language. After cataloguing all the phonemes, morphemes, and many lexemes, I can still hear a string of Ik speech whose meaning escapes me entirely. I have tried to write a true description of Ik, but the language in use is much more colorful...and alive.

With this grammar I have also tried to initiate a philological tradition for Ik—‘philological’ in the etymological sense of ‘love of learning’, yes, but also in the sense of language study from written sources. From now on, one can study Ik from books alone, perhaps furthering the inquiry into the relationships between East African languages and where they came from. Attending to these questions is attending to the people who speak these languages, and this is one way we can communicate our love for them too.

*“Man [and the language he speaks: TBS] is a mystery. It needs to be unraveled, and if you spend your whole life unraveling it, don’t say you’ve wasted time. I am studying that mystery because I want to be a human being.”*

F. Dostoevsky 1839.

*“To decipher man [and the language he speaks: TBS] is essentially to try to find out how the world was made and how it ought to go on making itself. The science of man is the practical and theoretical science of hominisation. It means profound study of the past and of origins. But still more, it means constructive experiment pursued on a continually renewed object.”*

Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

*“Grammar would appear to represent the pinnacle of humanness.”*

Martin Edwardes (2010)

## Abbreviations

---

1	first person	DISTR	distributive
2	second person	DP	dummy pronoun
3	third person	EMPH	emphatic particle
A	transitive subject	EV	epenthetic vowel
ABL	ablative	EXC	exclusive
ABST	abstractive	FF	final form
ACC	accusative	FILL	filler word
ADJ.PL	adjectival plural	FUT2	removed future
ADV	adverb	FUT3	remote future
AGT	agentive	G	glide (semi-vowel)
AND	andative	GEN	genitive
ANPH	anaphoric	H	high tone
ATR	advanced tongue root	HORT	hortative
AUX	auxiliary	HYPO	hypothetical
BHVR	behaviorative	IDEO	ideophone
C	consonant	IMP	imperative
CAUS	causative	INC	inclusive
CC	copula complement	INCH	inchoative
COMP	completive	INF	infinitive
COMPL	complementizer	INFR	inferential
CONF	confirmational	INS	instrumental
CONJ	conjunction	INT	intentional
COP	copulative	INTJ	interjection
CS	copula subject	IPFV	imperfective
DAT	dative	IPS	impersonal passive
DEF	definite	IRR	irrealis
DEM	demonstrative	L	low tone
DIM	diminutive	M	mid pitch
DIST	distal	MED	medial

MID	middle	PST2	removed past
N	noun	PST3	remote past
NF	non-final form	QUOT	quotative particle
NOM	nominative	REAL	realis
NP	noun phrase	RECIP	reciprocal
O	object	REFL	reflexive
OBL	oblique	REL	relative pronoun
OPT	optative	S	subject
PASS	passive	SEQ	sequential
PAT	patientive	SG	singular
PHYS1	physical property I	SIML	simultaneous
PHYS2	physical property II	SING	singulative
PL	plurative, plural	SPS	sequential impersonal
PLUR	pluractional		passive
POSS	possessive	STAT	stative
PRES	distended present	SUB	substantive
PRF	perfect	SUBJ	subjunctive
PRO	pronoun	V	verb, vowel
PROX	proximal	VCS	verbless clause subject
PSSM	possessum	VEN	venitive
PST1	recent past		



## Symbols

---

∅	zero realization
*	proto- or archaic form
**	ungrammatical
→	realized as, progressively assimilates
←	regressively assimilates
↗	is not realized as
=	results in
≠	does not result in
[ ]	phonetic form, allophone
//	phonemic form, allomorph
{ }	morphemic form
-	morpheme boundary
=	clitic boundary
+	joined to
>	historically becomes
↓	downdrift, downstep
ˊ	high tone or pitch
ˋ	low pitch
ˊˋ	low-falling pitch
ˊˋˊ	mid-to-high pitch rise
ˋˊ	high-to-low pitch fall
-	mid pitch
+	floating [+ATR]
	pause
†	deceased



## Affixes

<i>Affix</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Full name</i>	<i>Section</i>
-Ø	[OBL]	Oblique Case	§6.3.1
-Ø	[IRR]	Irrealis Modality	§7.7.1
-a <sup>+</sup>	NOM	Nominative Case	§6.3.2
-a <sup>+</sup>	REAL	Realis Modality	§7.7.2
-aák <sup>+</sup> -	DISTR	Distributive Adjectival	§7.10.6
-amá <sup>+</sup> -	PAT	Patientive Nominalizer	§7.2.4
-án <sup>+</sup> -	STAT	Stative Adjectival	§7.10.3
-aní-	IPS	Impersonal Passive	§7.9.3
-ano´	OPT/HORT	Optative First Plural/Hortative	§7.7.4
-ásí-	ABST	Abstractive Nominalizer	§7.2.3
-áti	3PL	Third Person Plural	§5.1.2, §7.5
-ɔ	INS	Instrumental Case	§6.3.3
-ɔ	ABL	Ablative Case	§6.3.4
-ɔni-	INF	Intransitive Infinitive	§7.2.1
-ɔsí-	PASS	Passive	§7.9.2
-ε	GEN	Genitive Case	§6.3.5
-εδε-	POSS.SG	Possessive Singulative	§4.2.6
-és	INT	Intentional Modality	§7.7.3
-és	IPFV	Imperfective Aspect	§7.8.3
-εσε´	SPS	Sequential Impersonal Passive	§7.9.4
-ésí-	INF	Transitive Infinitive	§7.2.2
-εt-	VEN	Venitive Directional	§7.4.2
-εt-	INCH	Inchoative Aspect	§7.8.5
-ε´	IMP.SG	Imperative Singular	§7.7.6
-i	3SG	Third Person Singular	§5.1.2, §7.5
-í-	PLUR	Pluractional Aspect	§7.8.8
-ia´-	1SG[SEQ]	Sequential First Person Singular	§7.8.1
-ís	IMP.PL	Imperative Plural	§7.7.6

<i>Affix</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Full name</i>	<i>Section</i>
-ídi	2SG	Second Person Singular	§5.1.2, §7.5
-íí	1SG	First Person Singular	§5.1.2, §7.5
-ík-	ADJ.PL	Plural Adjectival	§7.10.5
-íka-	PL	Plurative III	§4.2.3
-íkó-	PL	Plurative I	§4.2.1
-ím-	MID	Middle 2	§7.9.5
-íma´	1PL.EXC[OPT]	Optative First Plural Exclusive	§7.7.4
-íma´-	1PL.EXC[SEQ]	Sequential First Plural Exclusive	§7.8.1
-ímí	1PL.EXC	First Person Plural Exclusive	§5.1.2, §7.5
-ínósí-	RECIP	Reciprocal	§7.9.6
-íne´	1SG[OPT]	Optative First Singular	§7.7.4
-íni	3PL[SEQ]	Sequential Third Person Plural	§7.8.1
-íni-	POSS.PL	Possessive Plurative	§4.2.5
-ísíni	1PL.INC	First Person Plural Inclusive	§5.1.2, §7.5
-ít-	CAUS	Causative	§7.9.1
-ítí	2PL	Second Person Plural	§5.1.2, §7.5
-ítíni-	PL	Plurative II	§4.2.2
-ka <sup>+</sup>	ACC	Accusative Case	§6.3.6
-kɔ	COP	Copulative Case	§6.3.8
-kɔ	SEQ	Sequential Aspect	§7.8.1
-kɛ	DAT	Dative Case	§6.3.7
-kɛ	SIML	Simultaneous Aspect	§7.8.2
-nanesi-	BHVR	Behaviorative Verbalizer	§7.2.6
-uʔɔtí-	AND	Andative Directional	§7.4.1
-uʔɔtí-	COMP	Completive Aspect	§7.8.6
-ʋd-	PHYS1	Physical Property I Adjectival	§7.10.1
-ʋkV-	SUB	Substantive Nominalizer	§7.2.5
-ʋm-	MID	Middle 1	§7.9.5
-ʋm-	PHYS2	Physical Property II Adjectival	§7.10.2
-ʋma-	SING	Human Singulative	§4.2.7
-ʔka <sup>+</sup>	PRF	Present Perfect Aspect	§7.8.7

### Morphemes grammaticalizing into affixes (?)

<i>Morpheme</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Full name</i>	<i>Section</i>
-ajíká-	INT.PL	Internal Plurative	§4.3.6
-ama <sup>+</sup> -	AGT.SG	Agentive Singular	§4.3.4
-ení-	PSSM	Impersonal Possessum	§5.2
-icé-	AGT.PL	Agentive Plural	§4.3.4
-icíká-	VAR.PL	Variative Plurative	§4.3.7
-imá-	DIM.SG	Diminutive Singular	§4.3.3
-wicé-	DIM.PL	Diminutive Plural	§4.3.3



## Archaic Affixes

<i>Affix</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Section</i>
*a-	Gender marker?	?	§4.1.4
*a-	Verbal prefix	?	§7.1.4
*-a(t)	Singulative	Teso-Turkana/Cushitic?	§4.1.4
*-áŋi-	First sg. possessive	Proto-/Pre-Kuliak?	§4.4
*-ata-	Singulative	Teso-Turkana/Cushitic?	§4.1.4
*-ati-	Singulative	Teso-Turkana/Cushitic?	§4.1.4
*-atí-	Third sg. possessive	Proto-/Pre-Kuliak?	§4.4
*ɔ-/o-	Gender marker?	?	§4.1.4
*ε-/e-	Verbal prefix	?	§7.1.4
*ha-	Verbal prefix	?	§7.1.4
*ɪ-/i-	Class 2 verbal prefix	Teso-Turkana	§7.1.4
*-ísí-	Nominalizer	Eastern Nilotic	§7.2.3
*-ita-	Singulative	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*-iti-	Singulative	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*-kɪ/ki-	Preposition, case?	(pre-)Nilotic	§4.1.4
*lo-/lɔ-	Locative masc./neuter	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*na-	Locative feminine	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*-nan-	Nominalizer	?	§7.2.5
*nd(V)-	Interrogative	Proto-Nilo-Saharan	§5.4
*nt(V)-	Interrogative	Proto-Nilo-Saharan	§5.4
*ɲV-	Nominal gender	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*ŋa-	Feminine plural prefix	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*ŋi-	Masc./neuter plurative	Teso-Turkana	§4.1.4
*-oo-	Second sg. possessive	Proto-/Pre-Kuliak?	§4.4
*sɪ-/si-	Nominal prefix	(pre-)Nilotic	§4.1.4
*tɔ-/to-/ta/	Class I verbal subsec.	Teso-Turkana	§7.1.4
*tɛ-/te-	Verbal prefix	?	§7.1.4
*tɪ-/ti-	Nominal prefix	?	§4.1.4
*tɪ-/ti-	Verbal prefix	?	§7.1.4

<i>Affix</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Section</i>
*-Vc	Singulative	Cushitic	§4.1.4
*-Vd-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vk-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vl-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vɲ	Singulative	Cushitic	§4.1.4
*-Vɲ-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vɳ-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vr-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vs-	Adjectival?	Proto-Nilo-Saharan?	§7.10.2
*-Vts'	Singulative	Cushitic/Surmic?	§4.1.4



## Clitics

<i>Clitic</i>	<i>Abbr.</i>	<i>Full name</i>	<i>Section</i>
=batse	PST2	Removed Past Marker	§7.11
=já	ADV	Adverb: ‘so, then, just’	§8.3
=jikɪ	ADV	Adverb: ‘also, too, even’	§8.3
=kótó	ADV	Adverb: ‘so, then, but’	§8.3
=ke	DEM.SG.DIST	Distal Demonstrative Enclitic Sg.	§8.2.1
=ki	DEM.PL	Distal Demonstrative Enclitic Pl.	§8.2.1
=na	DEM.SG	Proximal Dem. Enclitic Sg.	§8.2.1
=na	REL.SG	Non-Past Relative Pronoun Sg.	§5.6
=náka	PST1	Recent Past Marker	§7.11
=ná-ka	DEM.SG-PST1	Recent Past Demonstrative Sg.	§8.2.2
	REL.SG-PST1	Recent Past Relative Pronoun Sg.	§5.6
=ɲáka	ADV	Adverb: ‘so, then, just’	§8.3
=nɔkɔ	PST3	Remote Past Marker	§7.11
=nɔ-kɔ	DEM.SG-PST3	Remote Past Demonstrative Sg.	§8.2.2
	REL.SG-PST3	Remote Past Relative Pro. Sg.	§5.6
=ne	DEM.SG.MED	Medial Demonstrative Enclitic Sg.	§8.2.1
=ni	DEM.PL	Proximal Dem. Enclitic Pl.	§8.2.1
=ni	REL.PL	Non-Past Relative Pronoun Pl.	§8.2.2
			§5.6
=ní-ki	DEM.PL-PST1	Recent Past Demonstrative Pl.	§8.2.2
	REL.PL-PST1	Recent Past Relative Pronoun Pl.	§5.6
=nu-ku	REL.PL-PST3	Remote Past Demonstrative Pl.	§8.2.2
		Remote Past Relative Pronoun Pl.	§5.6
=si-na	DEM.SG-PST2	Removed Past Demonstrative Sg.	§8.2.2
	REL.SG-PST2	Removed Past Relative Pro. Sg.	§5.6
=si-ni	REL.PL-PST2	Removed Past Demonstrative Pl.	§8.2.2
		Removed Past Relative Pro. Pl.	§5.6
=‘dée	ANPH.SG	Anaphoric Demonstrative Sg.	§8.2.3
=‘díí	ANPH.PL	Anaphoric Demonstrative Plural	§8.2.3

<i>Clitic</i>	<i>Abbr.</i>	<i>Full name</i>	<i>Section</i>
= 'de	DP	Dummy Pronoun	§5.10, §6.6
ki =	DIST	Distal Demonstrative Proclitic Sg.	§5.5, §8.2.4
ki =	DIST	Distal Demonstrative Proclitic Pl.	§5.5, §8.2.4
na =	PROX	Proximal Dem. Proclitic Sg.	§5.5, §8.2.4
na <sup>+</sup> =	CONJ	Subordinating Conjunction	§8.4.1
ni =	PROX	Proximal Dem. Proclitic Pl.	§5.5, §8.2.4