

Terrill B. Schrock

A grammar of Ik (Icé-tód)

Northeast Uganda's last thriving Kuliak language

The Ik language (Icé-tód), spoken in northeast Uganda, forms the Kuliak (Rub) subgroup along with So/Tepeth and Nyang'í. These latter two lects have already succumbed to assimilative pressures from neighboring Nilotic pastoralists like the Karimojong, Turkana, and Pokot. Despite similar sociolinguistic circumstances, Ik has so far held up and still remains vital as the mother-tongue of hundreds of young children. Since Ik is the last member of a waning subgroup, its documentation and description may provide key pieces to the puzzle of East African linguistic and ethnic prehistory. The complexity of this prehistory is embodied in Ik grammar which shows many traits shared with languages in both Afroasistic and Nilo-Saharan language families. And so a full grammatical treatment of Ik can shed some needed light on the classification of other language groups.

To that end, this study offers a comprehensive but balanced grammatical analysis of Ik. It covers the basics of the Ik sociolinguistic milieu, genetic classification, phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. Of particular typological interest are Ik's unusual systems of vowel harmony, tone, and case, as well as the syntax of subordinate clauses, the grammaticalization of case in the verbal system, and sequential and simultaneous clause chains. Other fascinating topics include pre-pause devoicing, frozen prefixes, tensed modifiers, non-canonical passives, and an irrealis-realis modal distinction. Lastly, between the grammar and lexicon is provided a collection of five culturally relevant Ik texts as holistic examples of Ik in its natural context.

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