

1. Introduction

1.1. The Ik language

Icétôd is the native language of the Ik people who live on a narrow swath of land in the extreme northeastern corner of Uganda. The language name *Icétôd* means ‘Ik-speech’ or ‘Ik-talk’ and is pronounced *ee-CHAY-TOad* or [ĩtʃétôd] in phonetic symbols. Icétôd belongs to a small cluster of languages called ‘Kuliak’, which also includes Nyang’ia of Lobalangit and Soo/Tepeth of Mounts Moroto, Napak, and Kadam—all in Uganda’s beautiful Karamoja Region. It is absolutely *not true* that Icétôd is a dialect of Karimojong, nor is it even Nilotic or ‘Hamitic’. And it is certainly not Bantu. If it is related to Karimojong at all—scholars still disagree on this point—then it is no closer to it than would be, say, English to Russian or even Hindi.

One reason people think Icétôd is a dialect of ‘Karimojong’ is that the Ik have long been surrounded and dominated by the pastoralist Dodoth, Toposa, Turkana, and Jie peoples. These, as well as the Karimojong proper, all speak mutually intelligible dialects of a language cluster called ‘Ateker’, ‘Teso-Turkana’, or ‘Tunga’. Another reason Icétôd seems similar to Karimojong is that it has borrowed many hundreds of words from Teso-Turkana over the centuries. Such borrowing is completely natural and especially common in situations where there is an imbalance in power. The close contact the Ik have had with Teso-Turkana peoples has also induced Icétôd grammar to become more like Teso-Turkana in certain ways.

But despite many superficial similarities one may see between Icétôd and Teso-Turkana, their grammatical systems are quite different. For instance, while their vowel systems are similar, Icétôd has many more consonants than Teso-Turkana, including ejectives /k̰/ and /ts̰/. It also has an elaborate case system with eight cases all marked with suffixes, whereas Teso-Turkana languages mark only four cases, some using only tone. And although both Icétôd and Teso-Turkana order their words as Verb-Subject-Object in main clauses, in subordinate clauses, Icétôd changes the order to Subject-Verb-Object. These examples show that when one digs a little deeper linguistically, some of the profound differences between Icétôd and Teso-Turkana come to light.

1.2. The dictionary

I am certain there can be no comprehension of the present without the past, just as I am certain the past is not past. And there can be no comprehension of the present without all the tribes, human, animal, floral, and stones...at the table taking part in the talk.—Charles Bowden

This book contains a bilingual Icéôtôd-English dictionary and an English-Icéôtôd index. The dictionary section lists all the Ik words I have collected and recorded and offers English definitions for them. Including proper names, there are roughly 8,500 entries in the dictionary. Although I have done all I could to collect as many words as possible within the limits of time and resources, no doubt many other words still lurk out there in the recesses of Ik minds. It will not be until many more texts are written in Icéôtôd that these may be gently coaxed out onto the page and into more books like the present one.

Although the presumed purpose of a dictionary is to propound the current meanings of words, I fear that purpose is only partly achieved in this volume. The true meanings of words are lived meanings, intended by living beings in a living world. To capture them on a page is to encase them in black rock and white ice. A native speaker of Icéôtôd will recognize in my English definitions familiar traces of true meaning but never all of it. As a foreign, non-native speaker of Icéôtôd, my grasp of the living meanings of Icéôtôd words is severely limited. For the only way to learn living linguistic meanings is to experience life linguistically, *through* a language, through its words and phrases and tropes. Still, I have been fortunate enough to have had a few real-life experiences in Icéôtôd, for instance, when I learned the living meaning of the verb *isees* ‘to miss’ by actually missing a bushpig boar as I tried to spear it when it charged toward me. The young Ik hunters never let me forget that miss, and as they retold the story with glee, they always used that particular verb. So when I hear it, I not only know what it means in terms of ‘missing’ but I also *feel* the living overtones that include shame, regret, loss of opportunity, diminution of manhood, etc. *That* is how one learns the meanings of words.

Despite such exceptions, for the vast majority of Icéôtôd words in this dictionary, I have had to find definitions extrinsically, from the outside. As a foreign lexicographer, *I do not inhabit the words*. Because of that, all I could do—given the time and resources I had—was to try to understand the words’ meanings as best I could and