Icétôd

The Ik language
Dictionary and grammar sketch

Terrill Schrock

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For Amber Dawn

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Preface

When I first heard about the Ik back in September 2005, their story gripped me. Here was a people just emerging from the mists of time, from that now dark and shrouded country of African prehistory. Judging by appearances, their journey had not been easy. Their story spoke of great human suffering in the form of sickness, slavery, starvation, and slaughter. And yet, somehow, here they were, limping into the 21st century as survivors of human and subhuman conditions most of cannot imagine. Having grown up in a safe and secure community in the American South, I thought the Ik seemed stranger than fiction. People like this actually exist out there? I found myself wanting to know more about them, wanting to know who they are. Subconsciously I sensed that anyone who could survive what they had survived could perhaps teach me something about being human.

My quest to know the Ik has led me down a winding path to the present. Over the years I've often been frustrated at my inability to enter their world, to see the world through their eyes. More than once I wished I were an anthropologist, as if by being so I could get a better grasp of their essence as a people. But time and time again, life steered me right back to the language—to Icétôd. I gradually learned to accept that their language is a doorway to their spirit, and that as a linguist, I could only open the door for others, and point the way to the Promised Land while I remain at the threshold. This dictionary and grammar sketch can be a key to that door, a key that has been lovingly shaped and smoothened by hands tired but trembling with purpose.

Living in Ikland has taught me a lot about being human, but not in the way I would have expected. It was not by becoming 'one with the people' that I learned what it is like to endure subhuman conditions. And it was not physical starvation, or sickness, or slaughter that I was forced to endure. No, I was spared those things. Yet all the same, in Ikland I became acquainted with spiritual starvation, social sickness, and the wholesale slaughter of my cultural, religious, and intellectual idols. And just as the Ik have learned that life does not consist in 'bread alone', nor in health, nor in security—but can carry on living with dignity and humanity—I have learned that at the rock bottom of my soul, at that place where my self ends and the world begins, there is where Life resides. That realization is my 'pearl of great price' for which I have sold everything else and would do it all again.

Acknowledgements

Compiling a dictionary is a massive undertaking, far more so than I had imagined it would be. Although it was I alone who spent so many hours, days, and months on the project, a whole host of people put me in a position to do so. And here I wish to acknowledge them all.

First, I want to express a heartfelt *Ŧlákásʉkɔtíàà zùkᵘ* to all the Ik people of Timu for welcoming us into their community and patiently enduring the long process of a foreigner trying to learn their language. To the following Ik men and women, I give thanks for their participation in a word-collecting workshop from October 2009 in which roughly 7,000 Ik words were amassed: Ariko Hillary, Kunume Cecilia, Lochul Jacob, Lokure Jacob, Longoli Philip, Losike Peter, Lotuk Vincent, Nakiru Rose, Nangoli Esther, †Ngiriko Fideli, Ngoya Joseph, Ochen Simon Peter, Sire Hillary, and Teko Gabriel. The following ten Ik men are thanked for giving me a clearer view of the Ik sound system and for helping me edit several hundred words during an orthography workshop in April 2014: Amida Zachary, Dakae Sipriano, Lokauwa Simon, Lokwameri Sylvester, Lomeri John Mark, Longoli Philip, Longoli Simon, Lopeyok Simon, †Lopuwa Paul, and Lotuk Paul. One of those men, Longoli Philip, deserves special thanks for the years he spent as my main guide into the grammar and lexicon of Icétôd. The number and quality of entries in this book are owed in large part to his skillful labors. Four others—Lojere Philip, †Lochiyo Gabriel, Lokwang Hillary, and Lopuwa Paul—also deserve thanks for teaching me bits of the language at various points along the journey.

But it is another group of Ik men that I wish to give special honor. These are the ones who for an entire year went with me through every word in this dictionary, slowly and painstakingly, to refine their spellings and define their meanings. They include the respectable elders Iuɗa Lokauwa, Locham Gabriel, and Lemu Simon, as well as our translators Kali Clement, Lotengan Emmanuel, and Lopeyok Simon. The three elders not only shared their intimate knowledge of the language with me but also befriended me with a grace and humility that can only come with age. Every moment I spent with them was a blessing I will never forget. As they said, if I ever come back, I should ask if those old men are still around. I pray they are.

Next, I want to gratefully mention several linguistic colleagues who contributed to this work in one way or another: Bernd Heine whose Ik-English dictionary from 1999 formed a lexicographical foundation;

Ron Moe, who helped me lead the 2009 word-collection workshop; and Dusty Hill, who supervised and encouraged me all the way.

The fourth group I wish to thank are our friends and family whose generous donations have made it possible to live and work in Uganda since 2008. It has been a privilege to be financially supported in doing long-term work on the Ik language, and I don't take that for granted.

Fifth, I want to thank my own little family: my two daughters, Kaloyang Mercy and Lemu Immaculate, and my wife Amber Dawn. Their love and care enabled me to carry out this long work in an otherwise isolated and often very lonely environment. The existence of this book is owed in great measure to Amber's innumerable sacrifices big and small. It came into being at great cost to her. For that and many other reasons, I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

Finally, I want to thank God for making me a linguistic being in a linguistic universe where my mind and the Ik language could collide, sending out bright rays of new knowledge into the world.

Part I

Introduction

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 [īt∫étôd̪] in phonetic symbols. Icétôd belongs to a small cluster of languages called 'Kuliak', which also includes Nyang'ía 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 /ƙ/ and /ts'/. 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 Icétôd-English dictionary and an
English-Icétôd 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 Icétôd 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
Icétôd will recognize in my English definitions familiar traces of true
meaning but never all of it. As a foreign, non-native speaker of Icétôd,
my grasp of the living meanings of Icétôd 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 Icétôd, for instance, when I learned the living
meaning of the verb *isɛɛs* '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 Icétôd 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

render them in perspicacious English as a felicitous meeting place between two very different modes of linguistic being-in-the-world. To the degree that I succeeded, to the degree that it is useful, this is what I hope to be an adequate first comprehensive Icétôd-English lexicon.

The English definitions the reader will find are of various types. Some Icétôd words lend themselves easily to one-word, entirely accurate glosses, for example, *gʉɓérá-* as 'leopard'. Others require a short phrase in English, for instance, *kóré-* as 'back of the knee'. Still others, the ones that are conceptually more distant from English, call for longer descriptions, as when *makúlí-* is defined as 'round grass beehive cover that goes over the end of a hollow beehive'.

As well as being a record of modern Icétôd to be used for modern purposes, this dictionary also provides much data for historical research. Because Ik culture has left little in the way of archaeology, and because oral histories tend to be vague, inconsistent, and undated, language is one of the few lenses through which to investigate prehistory. Already the Icétôd lexicon gives some tantalizing hints as to the ancient northern East African origins of the Ik, for example in the link between words like *sɔkɔ́-* 'hoof' and Arabic *saaq* 'foot' and Gumuz *tʃagw* 'foot', or between *kɨdz-* 'bite' and Maltese Arabic *gidem* 'bite' and Uduk *k'ūcūr* 'suck'. Every Ik word is a cultural relic, a linguistic artifact sticking out of the red clays of time and memory. Each one has been molded by a million mouthings, much as grains of sand are ground down by water and wind. Each has its own history, an origin and a tortuous path of descent to its present form, the same path, we can assume, that its many speakers have taken. This is where the fields of etymology, historical linguistics, or 'paleolinguistics' can provide some evidence on which to build identity and cultural history.

A rooted sense of history and identity can help give the Ik a sure footing as they transition into a nationally and globally minded society. As I ponder the future fate of the Ik language, I see two possible paths it could take. One is that it could be totally assimilated by Karimojong much like Nyang'ía and Soo/Tepeth already have, or it could succumb to the dazzling promise of upward mobility that English makes to the young people. If either of these forms of language death should happen, at least this book would remain as a monument to a once noble language-mediated worldview.

The second path Icétôd could take into the future is the one I dream of. It is the one that would fulfill all my scholarly strivings and confirm my greatest hopes for the Ik. In this path, Icétôd would go on to become the language of a fully literate populace. With explicit knowledge of their grammar and lexicon, educated Ik people would harness the expressive power of their native-born tongue and make it a language of music, poetry, fiction, philosophy, theology, medicine, lower and higher education—literature of all types. This scrappy language that, with its speakers, has barely scraped by countless threats to its existence but somehow managed to pull through, this language that contains the linguistic genes of so many other languages from unrelated stocks, this small language of a small people in small place, could go on to become an enduring symbol of the Icean spirit.

As shown in Figure 1.1, Icétôd can be viewed from an 'Ik-centric' perspective as a 'heart' of East Africa. There it lies near the convergence of four East Africa nations: Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Over the centuries the Ik have migrated through and around each of those four nations. While they did so, their language absorbed words and grammar from the languages spoken in those nations. So in a very real sense, Icétôd embodies the linguistic heritage of northern East Africa. Therefore, could it be that Icétôd is uniquely and providentially situated to blossom into a language that can serve the full range of communicative needs of a modernized Ik society, and then extend its fruited boughs over the Rift Valley escarpment in four directions to become a blessing to the neighboring nations? Time will tell, but it is to the fulfillment of that dream that this book on Icétôd is wholeheartedly dedicated.

1.3. Using the dictionary

1.3.1. Writing system

The Icétôd portions of this dictionary and grammar sketch are written in what is called the Linguistic Orthography (LingO) as described in Schrock 2015. The LingO is a compromise between the simpler Popular Orthography (PopO) and a more scientific writing system. The main reason for choosing the LingO over the PopO is that the LingO encodes three very important features of the Icétôd sound system: voiceless vowels, vowel harmony, and tone. Although these three features are difficult to remember and write, they are indispensable for the correct pronunciation of Icétôd. Therefore it was decided that for this book to be an accurate and enduring record of the

language, the proper pronunciations would have to be reflected in the spellings. LingO writing can easily be converted to PopO, but the reverse is not true, since it requires great linguistic awareness.

The alphabetical order of Icétôd letters is given in (1) below. Note that the vowel pairs E/Ɛ, I/Ɨ, O/Ɔ, and U/Ʊ—whose members differ only in terms of a linguistic feature called Advanced Tongue Root [ATR]—are alphabetized as if they were the same letter. This is done to assist non-native speaker to find words with vowels they might not be able to distinguish at first. Also note that the letter (Ʒ) is in parentheses because even though it belongs to the alphabet, no recorded Ik word begins with that letter. For the pronunciation of these letters, the reader is referred to §2.1 of the grammar sketch in Appendix A.

(1) Icétôd alphabetical order:

A B 'B C D 'D Dz E/Ɛ F G H H'y I/Ɨ J J' K Ƙ L M N Ɲ Ŋ O/Ɔ
P R S T Ts Ts' U/Ʊ W X Y Z (Ʒ)

1.3.2. Structure of entries

The Icétôd-English dictionary section contains entries of the following kinds of Icétôd words: nouns, pronouns, demonstratives, quantifiers, numerals, prepositions, verbs, adverbs, ideophones, interjections, nursery words, complementizers, and connectives (or conjunctions). For a brief description of each word class, the reader is referred to §3 of the grammar sketch in Appendix A. The goal of the present section is to explain to the user the structure of lexicographical entries. To do this, an example of noun entry and a verb entry are discussed.

A typical noun entry has several components. To identify them, match the numbered components in this explanatory paragraph with the superscript number in the model entry below. 1) The lexical headword is in bold typeface. It is the citation form of the noun, that is, the form of the noun spoken in isolation. In Icétôd, the citation form takes the nominative case (see §7.2 in Appendix A). 2) The root or lexical form is in parentheses. It is hyphenated to show that it needs a case ending, and it is the form on which to base all other case forms of this noun. This particular noun is hyphenated in the middle also to signify that it is a compound noun made of two parts (see §4.3 in Appendix A). 3) This is an abbreviation for 'plural', indicating that the next item is the plural form of the headword. 4) This is the plural form of the singular headword *bàdìàm*. 5) This number (1) indicates that what follows is the first and primary sense or meaning of the headword. 6) This is an

Figure 1.1: The language area from an 'Ik-centric' perspective

abbreviation of the grammatical category of the word, in this case *n.* for 'noun'. 7) After the primary sense, one or more other senses of the word may be added. 8) After the senses, one or more notes may mention further information about the entry, for example cultural details or suggestions for synonymns or near-synonyms.

[1]**bàdìàm** [2](bàdì-àmà-) [3]*pl.* [4]badiik[a] [5]1) [6]*n.* sorcerer, wizard [7]2) anything spooky, weird, or uncanny | [8]The concept of *bàdìàm* includes nocturnal animals like bats, hyenas, and owls that have strange characteristics... tobacco is also called *bàdìàm* because its strong physiological effects are not attributable to human agency.

A typical verb entry has similar components but also some different ones: 1) Same as nouns, the verbal headword is shown in bold typeface. This is the citation form of the verb, which in Icétôd appears in the infinitive form and nominative case (see §8.2 in Appendix A). As an infinitive, the verb is acts as a noun at this point, much like 'to go' or 'going' in English. To use an Icétôd infinitive as a verb, simply remove the infinitive suffix (either *ònì-* or *ésí-*) and use the appropriate suffixes (see §8.7). 2) Then, the form in the parentheses is the lexical form of the infinitive headword, the one that is the base for all other case-inflected forms of the verb. 3) This number (1) indicates that what follows is the first and primary sense or meaning of the headword. 4) This is an abbreviation of the grammatical category of the headword, in this case *v.* for 'verb'. 5) After the primary sense, one or more other senses of the headword may be added. 6) This short note directs the user to a synonym or near-synonym of the headword.

[1]**betsínón** [2](betsínónì-) [3]1) [4]*v.* to be awkward, gauche, inept [5]2) to be left-handed, sinistral | [6]See also *ɨbaŋɨbáŋɔ̀n*.

Over a hundred Icétôd verb roots end in /a/, /e/, or /ɛ/, meaning that when an infinitive suffix is added to the root, these root-final vowels are assimilated (see §2.4.4). For example, though the root for 'miss' is *ɨsá-*, the infinitive form is *ɨsɛɛs*, obscuring the root-final vowel. Lest the dictionary user hear a form of the root *ɨsá-* in speech and then fail to deduce its infinitive *ɨsɛɛs*, both root and infinitive have been listed in the dictionary. The entry for *ɨsá-* includes the formulism (<ɨsɛɛs) which indicates that *ɨsɛɛs* is the entry the user should go to for the definition. Conversely, the entry for *ɨsɛɛs* 'to miss' includes both the lexical form of the infinitive and the bare root, as in **ɨsɛɛs** (ɨsɛɛsɨ́-/ɨsá-).

1.3.3. Tips for finding words

Finally, because many Icétôd words have more than one form and because many of them can be spelled multiple ways, let me offer the user a few tips for locating polymorphous words in the dictionary:

- If you are looking up a <u>verb</u> beginning with /i/ or /ɨ/ and cannot find it, remove the /i/ or /ɨ/ and try again. Conversely, if you are looking up any <u>verb</u> and cannot find it, try adding an /i/ or /ɨ/ to see if that takes you to a listed word.

- If you are looking up a word beginning with /w/ and cannot find it, try replacing the /w/ with /ɔ/, /o/, /ʉ/, or /u/. Conversely, if you are looking up a word beginning with /ɔ/, /o/, /ʉ/, or /u/ and cannot find it, try adding a /w/ before the vowel.

- If you are looking up a <u>noun</u> beginning with /ɲa/ and cannot find it, try replacing it with /ɲe/ and vice versa.

- If you are looking up a <u>noun</u> beginning with /ɲe/ and cannot find it, try replacing it with /ɲo/ and vice versa.

- If you are looking up a word beginning with /ts/ and cannot find it, try replacing it with /ts'/ and vice versa.

- If you are looking up a word beginning with /dz/ and cannot find it, try replacing it with /ts/ or /ts'/ and vice versa.

- If you are looking up a word beginning with /g/ and cannot find it, try replacing it with /ɠ/ or /ŋ/ and vice versa.

Part II

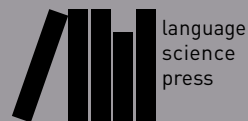# Ik-English dictionary

Part III

English-Ik reversal index

Part IV

Grammar sketch

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