

# *A Concise Grammar of Ishiculu*

A GRAMMAR CONSTRUCTED

BY

MING ZHANG

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# 1

## Demographics and ethnographics

ISHICULU IS A CREOLE LANGUAGE spoken by the Kuxutshwe, a community in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa of people of mixed Zulu and Chinese ancestry. The term “Kuxutshwe” means “mixed” in Zulu, and is the self-referent of the Kuxutshwe people.

Before the 2020s, there had been American scholars and organizations in eastern South Africa building health infrastructure. This trend motivated other organizations, mostly from the Greater China Region, to add to their presence in eastern South Africa. By the end of the 2020s, because of a strengthened South African government and a pivot of US international policies, most

Zulu	71.8%
English	15.2%
Xhosa	4.4%
Afrikaans	2.6%
Ishiculu	< 0.01%

**Table 1.0.1:** Major languages spoken in KwaZulu-Natal (2105)

Americans set out to contribute to cross-nation collaborations had left. In 2034, a private corporation from Taiwan discovered an oil well just off Richards Bay, a town in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This incentivized more Chinese people to reside in eastern South Africa, and a community of Ishiculu speakers descended from a mixture of Zulu and Chinese people. By 2105, Ishiculu had about 1500 speakers in KwaZulu-Natal.

Ishiculu is now mostly spoken in KwaZulu-Natal near the east coast. In these communities where Ishiculu is spoken, Zulu and Chinese are usually also used. The Kuxutshwe people usually live and engage in social interactions with Zulu and Chinese people. Both Chinese and Ishiculu have seen a slight decrease in the number of speakers since the 2080s, a fact possibly attributed partially to their lack of legal status. There has been some but insufficient literature on marginalization of the Kuxutshwe people in both Zulu- and Chinese-speaking communities, but the existing research has indicated that the interactions between Ishiculu speakers and other peoples are mostly friendly and social, and that the marginalization stems from the way local educational and legal systems are set up. The major languages spoken in KwaZulu-Natal is listed in Table 1, and the racial makeup of Richards Bay is shown in Table 2.

Black African	43.0%
Coloured (Including Kuxutshwe)	4.2%
Indian/Asian	19.2%
White	33.1%
Other	0.4%

**Table 1.0.2:** Racial makeup of Richards Bay (2101)



**Figure 1.0.1:** Migration of Chinese people to South Africa in the 2030s

# 2

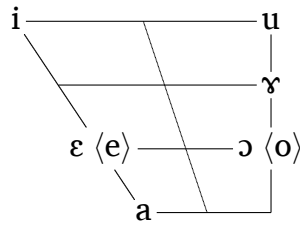
## Phonology

### 2.1 PHONEME INVENTORY OF ISHICULU<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pronounced [iʃɪˈtʃuːlʊ]

		Labial	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar
Stop	voiced	b	d			g ⟨g⟩
	voiceless	p	t			k
	aspirated	p <sup>h</sup> ⟨ph⟩	t <sup>h</sup> ⟨th⟩			k <sup>h</sup> ⟨kh⟩
Nasal		m	n		ɲ ⟨gn⟩	ŋ ⟨ng⟩
Trill			r			
Fricative	voiced			ʒ ⟨zh⟩		ɣ ⟨gh⟩
	voiceless	f	s	ʃ ⟨sh⟩		x ⟨h⟩
Affricate	voiced		ɖz ⟨dz⟩	ɖʒ ⟨j⟩		
	voiceless		ts ⟨ts⟩	tʃ ⟨ch⟩		
Lateral fricative	voiced		ɬ			
	voiceless		ɮ			
Approximant		ʋ			j ⟨y⟩	w
Lateral approximant			l			
Click			ɓ   ⟨c⟩			



## 2.2 SYLLABLE STRUCTURE

Possible syllable structures in Ishiculu are (C)V and N<sub>1</sub>C<sub>1</sub>V, where N<sub>1</sub> is a nasal with the same place of articulation as C<sub>1</sub>. For example:

Ishiculu /i.fɪ.ɓ|u.lu/ V.CV.CV.CV  
unjani /u.ɲɖʒa.ni/ V.NCV.CV

## 2.3 TONES AND STRESS

### 2.3.1 TONE CATEGORIES

Ishiculu has four tones.

Description	low	high	rising	falling
IPA diacritic	à	á	ǎ	â
Tone contour	11	55	35	51

### 2.3.2 INTERACTIONS BETWEEN VOICED STOPS AND TONES

Voiced stops in Ishiculu (i.e. /b/, /d/, and /g/) add a low-tone onset to the normal tone.

Normal tone	à (low)	á (high)	ǎ (rising)	â (falling)
New tone	bà (low)	bǎ (rising)	bǎ (rising)	bǎ (rising-falling)

### 2.3.3 STRESS

The stress of an Ishiculu word falls on the penultimate syllable and results in lengthening of the vowel. For example:

Ishiculu	/i.ʃi.ɲ u.lu/	[iʃi <sup>ɲ</sup>  u:lu]
unjani	/u.ɲd͡ʒa.ni/	[uɲd͡ʒa:ni]



# 3

## Verbs

### 3.1 AGREEMENTS

Ishiculu exhibits highly synthetic verbal morphology. Prefixation and suffixation are responsible for marking the tense, the subject, and when applicable, the object of the verb. Ishiculu is mostly agglutinative in terms of its verb affixation: different grammatical features of the verb are expressed through different affixes, except for the person and the number, which are contained in the same prefix. On the other hand, the nominal morphology of Ishiculu is marginally synthetic, with nouns having only affixes for locative cases.

There are both inflectional and derivational affixes in Ishiculu, while most inflectional affixes are attached to verbs.

Ishiculu follows accusative alignment. The verb is marked according to a nominative-accusative system. The verb stem is inflected based on the person, number, and for 3rd person nominal phrases, the noun class. The structure of an inflected Ishiculu verb consists of nominative agreement, dative agreement, accusative agreement, stem, derivational suffixes, and tense, in this order. Ishiculu verbs agree with the subject and the direct and indirect objects, if any. The agreement with the subject and the direct object is presented through prefixation to verbs, while the agreement with the indirect object is expressed through suffixation. The same set of affixes is used for all three agreements.

Ishiculu has a rich agreement system on verbs. In this sense, it is predominantly head-marking.

- (1) *Shi-shiy-ioani-ø*      ntaŋo kitabu.  
 1PL-CL7.SG-like-PRS CLF.7 book(7)  
 ‘We (will) like the book.’

Ishiculu follows accusative alignment. The verb is marked according to a nominative-accusative system. The verb stem is inflected based on the person, number, and for 3rd person nominal phrases, the noun class.

Sbj/obj prefixes	singular		plural	
	before C	before V	before C	before V
1st person	-ngi-	-ngiw-	-shi-	-shiy-
2nd person	-u-	-uw-	-ni-	-niy-
CL 1/2	-ka-		-ba-	
CL 3/4	-u-	-uw-	-i-	-iy-
CL 5/6	-ŋi-	-ŋiy-	-a-	
CL 7/8	-shi-	-shiy-	-zi-	-ziy-

- (2) *Elly pa ki-so*      ntaŋo kitabu.  
 Elly not 3SG-like CLF.7 book(7)

‘Elly doesn’t read the book.’

- (3) Elly pa kiw-ioani ntało kitabu.  
Elly not 3SG-like CLF.7 book(7)  
‘Elly doesn’t like the book.’

### 3.2 TENSES

Ishiculu has two tenses: present and past. The present tense is marked with a *-ø* suffix, and can be used for future events. The past tense is marked with a *-mbi* suffix.

- (4) Tse-kiw-ioani-ø ntało kitabu.  
1PL-3SG-like-PRS CLF.7 book(7)  
‘We (will) like the book.’
- (5) Tse-kiw-ioani-mbi ntało kitabu.  
1PL-3SG-like-PST CLF.7 book(7)  
‘We used to like the book.’

### 3.3 IMPERATIVE

The imperative can occur either alone or with an object prefix.

	Alone	With object
Singular	<i>-a</i>	<i>-e</i>
Plural	<i>-ani</i>	<i>-eni</i>

- (6) shi-a  
read\_aloud-IMP  
‘Read aloud!’
- (7) ki-shi-e ntało kitabu  
read\_aloud-IMP CLF.7 book(7)  
‘Read the book aloud!’

### 3.4 VALENCY-CHANGING PROCESSES

#### 3.4.1 PASSIVE

Morphological passive in Ishiculu is marked with *-walɣ* and decreases the valence of transitive verbs.

- (8) Ntało kitabu shi-so-*walɣ*-mbi.  
CLF.7 book(7) 7-read-PASS-PST  
'The book was read.'
- (9) U -bon -*walɣ* -mbi.  
2SG -see -PASS -PST  
'You were seen.'

#### 3.4.2 IMPERSONAL

When the verb is impersonal, it does not bear a subject concord prefix.

Ishiculu allows for impersonal meteorological predicates.

- (10) Cofi ha-mbi.  
yesterday rain-PST  
'It rained yesterday.'
- (11) Tumɣ rɣ.  
tomorrow hot  
'It will be hot tomorrow.'

Impersonal construction is also used for indefinite subjects.

- (12) Pa ngi-shi-so ntało kitabu.  
not 1SG-7-read CLF.7 book  
'I don't read the book.'
- (13) Pa shi-so ntało kitabu.  
not 7-read CLF.7 book  
'One doesn't/shouldn't read the book.'

### 3.4.3 CAUSATIVE

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The suffix *-la* mark the causative form of a verb. Accordingly, the causee of the causative verb is marked with an indirect object suffix after the causative suffix.

- (14) Fu-Philadelphia ni-hi-*la*-ki                      Elly ntało kitabu.  
in-Philadelphia 1SG-hear-CAUS-3SG Elly CLF.7 book(7)  
'I (will) read the book to Elly.'

)

The suffix *-la* marks the causative form of a verb. The causer of the causative verb is marked with an additional prefix.

- (15) Ngi-ka-shi-so-*la*      Ari ntało kitabu.  
1SG-1-7-have-CAUS Ari CLF.7 book(7)  
'I (will) make Ari read the book.'
- (16) Fu-Philadelphia ngi-ka-shi-ke-*la*      Ari ntało kitabu.  
in-Philadelphia 1SG-1-7-have-CAUS Ari CLF.7 book(7)  
'I (will) give the book to Ari in Philadelphia.'

The suffix *-la* marks the causative form of a verb. The causer of the causative verb is marked with an additional prefix on the verb.

- (17) Ngi-ka-shi-so-*la*      Ari ntało kitabu.  
1SG-1-7-have-CAUS Ari CLF.7 book(7)  
'I (will) make Ari read the book.'

### DITRANSITIVE

Prototypical verbs in Ishiculu are transitive at most, and verbs that semantically require three thematic core arguments are usually expressed through causatives of transitive verbs.

- (18) Fu-Philadelphia *ngi-ka-shi-ke-ḷa* Ari *ntaḷo* *kitabū*.  
 in-Philadelphia 1SG-1-7-have-CAUS Ari CLF.7 book(7)  
 ‘I (will) give Ari the book in Philadelphia.’
- (19) W<sub>ṛ</sub> *babamama* *ba-ngiw-u-nde-ḷa-mbi* *mina*  
 CLF.2 parents(2) 2.PL-1SG-4.SG-eat-CAUS-PST 1SG  
*shizi*.  
 cheese(4)  
 ‘My parents fed me cheese.’

#### 3.4.4 PASSIVE OF CAUSATIVE

The causee or the object can be promoted to the subject position with the passive construction. Following the parallelism between ditransitive and causative verbs, their passive constructions are also indistinguishable in morphology.

##### PROMOTING CAUSEE

This refers to the passive construction similar to the following:

- (20) Passive of causative of intransitive in English  
 John makes me cringe. → I am made to cringe (by John).
- (21) Passive of causative of transitive in English  
 John makes the computer change the date. → The computer is made to change the date (by John).
- (22) Passive of ditransitive in English  
 John gives the teacher the book. → The teacher is given the book (by John).

This construction in Ishiculu is formed by a passive suffix *-walṛ* after the causative suffix. The personal suffix of the causer on the verb is then dropped.

- (23) Passive of causative of intransitive in Ishiculu

- a. Ngi-ka -hulu-ła-mbi John.  
1SG-1.SG -cry-CAUS-PST John  
'I made John cry.'
- b. John ka -hulu-ła-walʁ-mbi.  
John 1.SG -cry-CAUS-PASS-PST  
'John was made to cry.'

(24) Passive of ditransitive/causative of transitive in Ishiculu

- a. Shiy-u-ko -meʁi-ła-mbi hehe.  
1PL-2SG-5.SG -receive\_by\_mail-CAUS-PST cake(5)  
'We mailed you cake.'
- b. U-ko -meʁi-ła-walʁ-mbi hehe.  
2SG-5.SG -receive\_by\_mail-CAUS-PASS-PST cake(5)  
'You were mailed cake.'

PROMOTING OBJECT

There is no passivization of a causative verb that directly promotes the underlying object, but it is possible to passivize the underlying verb, promoting the object to the causee position before promoting it further to the subject position of the matrix clause. As the subject in the active voice becomes impossible to be salient in the passive, the causee becomes ineffable in this passive construction.

(25) a. Active voice

John ka-u-shi -ke-ła meyi shʁntaʁo  
John 1.SG-3.SG-7.SG -have-CAUS CLF.3 teacher(3)  
kitabʁ.  
CLF.7 book(7)  
'John gives the teacher the book.'

b. Impossibility of direct promotion of object

\* Ntaʁo kitabʁ shi-u -ke-ła-walʁ meyi  
CLF.7 book(7) 7.SG-3.SG -have-CAUS-PASS CLF.3

shɣ.

teacher(3)

Intended meaning: 'The book is given to the teacher.'

c. Causative of passive

John ka-u-shi -ke-walɣ-ɬa ntaɔ kitabu.

John 1.SG-3.SG-7.SG -have-PASS-CAUS CLF.7 book(7)

'John gives the book.' (lit. 'John makes the book be given.')

d. Passive of causative of passive

Ntaɔ kitabu shi-ke-walɣ-ɬa-walɣ.

CLF.7 book(7) 7.SG-have-PASS-CAUS-PASS

'The book is given.' (lit. 'The book is made to be had.')

e. Ineffability of the causee

\* Ntaɔ kitabu shi-u -ke-walɣ-ɬa-walɣ meyi

CLF.7 book(7) 7.SG-3.SG -have-PASS-CAUS-PASS CLF.3

shɣ.

teacher(3)

Intended meaning: 'The book is given to the teacher.'

(lit. 'The book is made to be had.')