

## Some Basic Facts about the Dholuo Language

### 1. Genetic Grouping and Related Languages

Dholuo ( / ǀd̥ǀóǀúǀǀ / ) (or ‘Luo’) is a language from the Nilo-Saharan language family.

#### (1) The Nilo-Saharan Language Family

- One of the four major (and most controversial) super-families of languages in Africa.
- Languages in the family stretch from the Nile watershed into the Sahara, with a couple pockets in Western Africa. (17 nations, 11 million speakers)



Image taken from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nilo-Saharan.png>

- Comprises a large number of *highly typologically diverse* sub-branches.
- Dholuo is a member of the ‘Western Nilotic Branch’ of the ‘Nilotic’ sub-group, which is in turn a subgroup of the ‘Southern’ division of the ‘Eastern Sudanic’ sub-group of the ‘Chari-Nile’ sub-branch of the family:

Nilo-Saharan > Chari-Nile > Eastern-Sudanic > Southern ES > Nilotic > Western Nilotic > Luo > Southern Luo > (**Dholuo**, Acholi, Lango, Alur, Adhola, Kumam, Labwor, Lwo)

- Closest linguistic relatives: Lango and Acholi
- More distant relatives: Dinka, Nuer, Fur, Songhay, Masai and Nubian

## 2. Number of Speakers and Vitality of the Language

Dholuo is spoken by the 3.5 million Luo people of Kenya and Tanzania.

It is by no means an endangered language. Indeed, it is a major national language of both Kenya and Tanzania, and is a language of the media and broadcasting in both countries.

*However, there is comparatively little scholarship on the language.* What literature there is can be rather inaccessible:

- Out-of-print grammars and dictionaries (mainly for language learners)
- Many various articles in out-of-the-way journals.
- **Major works by Omondi (1982) and Okoth-Okombo (1982)**

## 3. Location

As stated above, Dholuo is principally spoken in Kenya and Tanzania. Specifically, it is spoken in an area surrounding parts of the eastern shore of Lake Victoria.

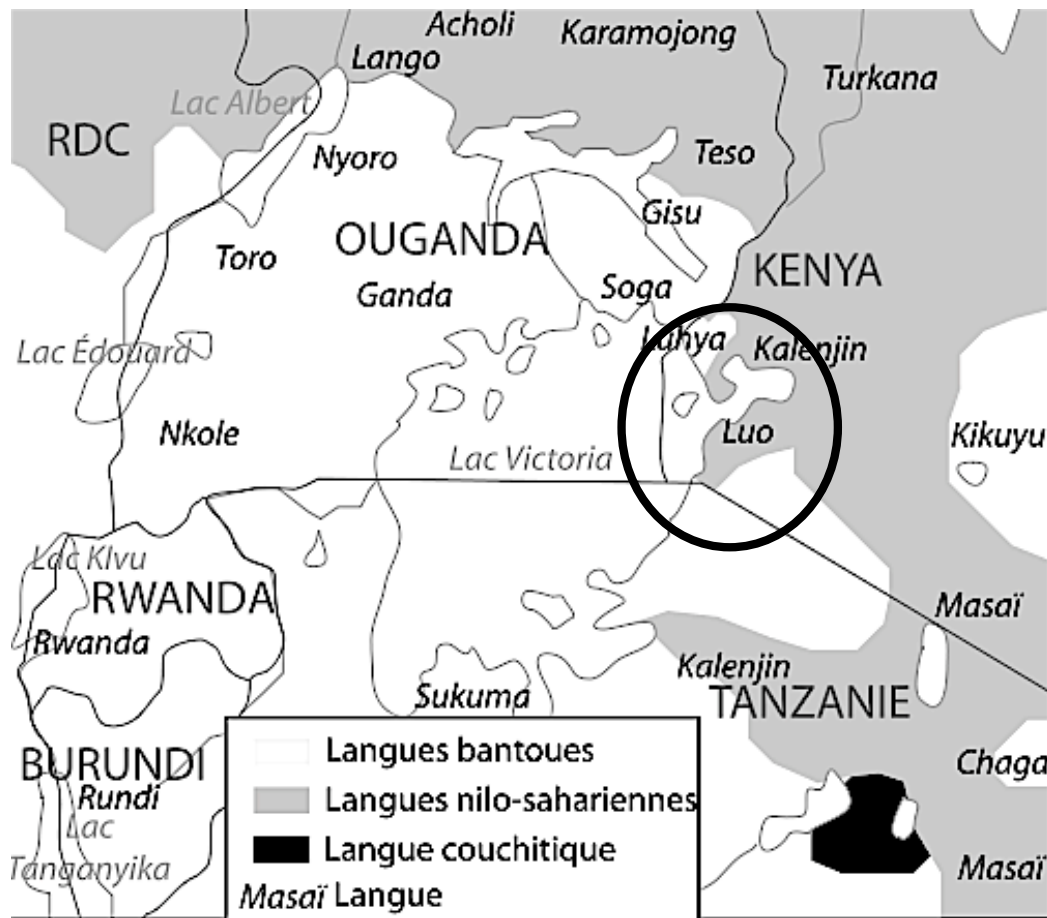


Image taken from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Image-Languages-Lakevictoria-fr.svg>

#### 4. Phonological Inventory and Orthography

- As mentioned in earlier classes, there is a Roman orthography for Dholuo which is entirely phonemic, and which keeps remarkably close to IPA.
- Eventually, we will transcribe all our Dholuo data using this orthography.
- Until then, though, we will use IPA and will ‘transliterate’ into Dholuo orthography.

##### 4.1 The Consonants

Below are the consonants of Dholuo. Each consonant is represented first in IPA notation, then in the Dholuo orthography. Paired with each consonant is a word from Dholuo beginning in that sound (which Martina will pronounce for us).

	<u>IPA</u>	<u>Dholuo Orthography</u>	<u>Example (in D.O.)</u>
<b><u>Bilabial:</u></b>			
voiceless stop	/ p /	p	pi 'water'
voiced stop	/ b /	b	.bur 'hole'
nasal stop	/ m /	m	.mór 'happiness'
prenasalized stop	/ mb /	mb	mbáká 'story'
glide (labiovelar?)	/ w /	w	wích 'head'
<b><u>Labio-Dental:</u></b>			
fricative	/ f /	f	fúó 'stupid'
<b><u>Dental:</u></b>			
voiceless affricate (stop?)	/ t̪θ /	th	thûl 'snake'
voiced affricate (stop?)	/ d̪ð /	dh	dhok 'mouth'
prenasalized affricate (stop?)	/ nd̪ð /	ndh	ndhíayó 'far'

	IPA	Dholuo Orthography	Example
<b><u>Alveolar:</u></b>			
voiceless stop	/ t /	t	tedo 'to cook'
voiced stop	/ d /	d	.díél 'goat'
nasal stop	/ n /	n	nendo 'sleep'
prenasalized stop	/ nd /	nd	ndiko 'to write'
rhotic (trill)	/ r /	r	.réch 'fish'
lateral	/ l /	l	lum 'grass'
fricative	/ s /	s	.súná 'mosquito'
<b><u>Palatal:</u></b>			
voiceless stop (affricate?)	/ c /	ch	chak 'milk'
voiced stop (affricate?)	/ ʃ /	j	ji 'people'
nasal stop	/ ɲ /	ny	nyakó 'girl'
prenasalized stop	/ ɲɟ /	nj	njofní 'tapeworm'
glide	/ j /	y	.yath 'tree,medicine'
<b><u>Velar:</u></b>			
voiceless stop	/ k /	k	.kâ 'here'
voiced stop	/ g /	g	gi 'thing'
nasal stop	/ ŋ /	ng'	.ng'á 'who'
prenasalized stop	/ ŋg /	ng	.ngégé 'tilapia'
<b><u>Glottal:</u></b>			
Fricative	/ h /	h	.higa "year"

## 4.2 The Vowels

As a first pass, Dholuo possesses a typical ‘five-vowel’ system. It has the following sounds:

- A high front vowel: / i /
- A mid front vowel: / e /
- A low central vowel: / a /
- A high back vowel: / u /
- A mid back vowel: / o /

However, for each of the five ‘vowel spaces’ above, Dholuo makes a further sub-distinction, between vowels that are (so-called) “+ATR” and ones that are (so-called) “-ATR”.

- In IPA, a “+ATR” vowel is indicated with the following sub-script: / ɨ /
- In IPA, a “-ATR” vowel is indicate with the following sub-script: / ɘ /

Thus, the full inventory of Dholuo vowels is as follows:

### (2) The Vowel Space of Dholuo

		FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
<b>HIGH</b>	<b>+ATR</b>	ɨ		ɯ
	<b>-ATR</b>	ɘ		ɘ
<b>MID</b>	<b>+ATR</b>	ɛ		ɔ
	<b>-ATR</b>	ɛ		ɔ
<b>LOW</b>	<b>+ATR</b>		ɤ	
	<b>-ATR</b>		ɤ	

#### 4.2.1 What is “ATR”?

This is actually something of a complex and controversial issue. As a first pass, though:

- (a) “ATR” stands for “Advanced Tongue Root”.
  - A vowel that is “+ATR” is pronounced with ‘advanced tongue root’.
  - A vowel that is “-ATR” is **not** pronounced with ‘advanced tongue root’.
- (b) ‘Advanced tongue root’ occurs when the speaker ‘expands’ their pharyngeal cavity, usually by *advancing* their *tongue root*.
- (c) The effect this has on the quality of the resulting vowel is complex.
  - However, luckily (or perhaps unluckily) for us, the resulting distinction is kind of similar to the distinction in English between so-called ‘tense’ and ‘lax’ vowels.
  - That is, to a first approximation, +ATR vowels sound tense, and -ATR vowels sound lax.
- (d) That is, you may sometimes hear the following rough equivalences in the vowel sounds of Dholuo:

- i. / ḭ / :: / i /
- ii. / i̠ / :: / ɪ /
- iii. / ḛ / :: / e /
- iv. / e̠ / :: / ε /
- v. / a̰ / :: / æ /
- vi. / a̠ / :: / a /
- vii. / ṵ / :: / u /
- viii. / u̠ / :: / ʊ /
- ix. / ɔ̰ / :: / o /
- x. / ɔ̠ / :: / ɔ /

However, these are only rough (and sometimes unstable) similarities. You may well often times have great difficulty hearing whether a given vowel is “+ATR” or “-ATR”.

- *That being said, let’s now see concretely how some of these vowels are pronounced!*
- *In the examples below, I proceed from the vowels where the ATR contrast is (to my ears) easiest to hear, and move gradually to the ones where it is (to my ears) hardest to hear.*

	<u>IPA</u>	<u>Dholuo Orthography</u>
<b><u>High Front Vowels</u></b>		
+ATR	/ w̥ɪc /	wich 'head'
-ATR	/ ɪc /	.ich 'stomache'
<b><u>Mid Back Vowels</u></b>		
+ATR	/ cɔ́gɔ́ /	chógó 'bone'
-ATR	/ mɔ́gɔ́ /	.mógó 'flour'
<b><u>High Back Vowels</u></b>		
+ATR	/ b̥ùr /	bur 'hole'
-ATR	/ bùr /	.bur 'boil'
<b><u>Mid Front Vowels</u></b>		
+ATR	/ àdêk /	adêk 'three'
-ATR	/ lèp /	.lep 'tongue'
<b><u>Low Central Vowels</u></b>		
+ATR	/ b̥áɔ́ /	báo 'wood'
-ATR	/ táɔ́ /	.táo 'dish'

#### 4.2.2 The Dholuo Orthography for “ATR”

*How do we represent in the Roman orthography for Dholuo whether a vowel is ATR or not?*

##### PROBLEM:

The official Roman orthography for Dholuo actually doesn't represent the ATR value of the vowel. That is, all high front vowels are written as “i”, whether or not they are ATR.

##### The Solution (Omondi 1982):

- You may have noticed that many of the words above are preceded by periods.
- This is a rather handy method Omondi (1982) uses to indicate the ATR status of the vowels.
- It relies on the following *crucial fact*:

##### **Crucial Fact: ‘ATR Harmony’**

- **In a given word of Dholuo, all the vowels have to have the same value for ATR.**
- **That is, all the vowels are “+ATR” or all the vowels are “-ATR”**

Omondi's Insight:

Since all the vowels of a Dholuo word will share the same ATR value, we can unambiguously represent the ATR value of all the vowels in the word via some kind of 'diacritic' at the beginning of the word!

**(3) The Rule For Representing ATR Values in the (Extended) Dholuo Orthography**

- (a) If the vowel(s) of the word are **-ATR**, begin the word with a period.
- (b) If the vowel(s) of the word are **+ATR**, don't put any period before the word.

*Notice how this rule is reflected in the spellings of the ATR-pairs above!*

**4.2.3 Combinations of Vowels**

Dholuo allows vowels to occur side-by-side. Some such combinations are illustrated below:

**(4) Adjacent Vowels in Dholuo Words**

	<u>IPA</u>	<u>Dholuo Orthography</u>	
a.	/ ɭ̥ɛt̥ /	liet	'hot'
b.	/ ɗ̥ɔ̥i̯a̯ŋ /	dhíàng'	'cow'
c.	/ g̥u̯ɛ̯n̥ɔ̯ /	.gueno	'hen'
d.	/ m̥u̯a̯ɗ̥a̯ /	muanda	'antelope'
e.	/ c̥u̯ɔ̯ /	.chúo	'men'

**4.3 Tone**

The last (but certainly not least) thing to mention in our introduction to the sound-system of Dholuo is *tone*. Like many languages of Africa, Dholuo is a *tone language*.

- There are four 'tones' or 'tonal melodies' that a vowel in Dholuo can bear:

**(5) The Tonal Melodies of Dholuo**

		<u>IPA</u>	<u>Dholuo Orthography</u>	
a.	High:	/ m̥ɔ̯n̥ /	món	'women'
b.	Low:	/ ɭ̥um̥ /	lum	'grass'
c.	Falling:	/ ɲ̥a̯ɲ̥a̯ /	.nyânyâ	'tomato'
d.	Rising:	/ ɭ̥aw̥ /	lăw	'dress'

Note that tones in Dholuo are represented just as they are in IPA, except that a low tone is indicated by the *absence* of any tonal diacritic.