

Nilotic languages display great typological diversity of morpho-syntactic phenomena. For instance, the sentence structure of these relatively little studied languages is spectacular. The sentence structure of Western Nilotic languages stands out as being highly unusual, not only on African standards but also compared to languages in other part of the world. All word orders except for SOV are observable in Nilotic languages. Some of them have case system to function grammatical relation, and others utilize word order for demonstrating grammatical relationship. 'Ergative' languages are sometimes argued to exist in Western Nilotic languages

Nilotic languages are relatively well studied among Nilo-Saharan phylum, though descriptive data are not enough for discussing various cross-linguistically interesting phenomena. Morpho-syntactic descriptive data are especially insufficient. This series offers descriptive data of Nilotic languages for discussing morpho-syntactic and other linguistic phenomena.

This series is based on accomplishment of the project 'Synchronic and diachronic studies of Nilotic morho-syntax' (Grant-in Aid Scientific Research (B)), being supported by the Japan Ministry of Education, Cultures, Sports, Science and Technology. The project is also supported by a global network of scholars who studies Nilotic languages.

The editor wants to thank all contributors for their support.

The Editor

The Labwor Language of Northeastern Uganda
A Grammatical Sketch
Bernd Heine and Christa König

Foreword

The present sketch, which is the result of a field trip to the Moroto Region of Northeastern Uganda in July 2009, would not have been possible without a generous grant that the authors received from the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. The authors wish to thank the Institute for its support, but most of all to our colleague Osamu Hieda, who assisted us in multiple ways in carrying out this work. Without his guidance and massive support we would never have embarked on the research leading to this study.

Our thanks are also due to Anne Storch for all the encouragement she gave us and for making accessible unpublished field material collected by her, and to the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology for supporting this research and providing us with a research permission (Ref. SS 2226, 10/07/09).

During our field work in Northeastern Uganda we were able to rely on the cooperation of many people, most of them residents of the community of Lotome in Bokora county of the Moroto Region. But above all, we feel indebted to our main consultants on the Labwor language, namely Aballa John Thompson, Ociero Timothy, Okot Charles, Omara Julius, and Sewanga Ojom. We wish to express our deeply felt gratitude to all of them for their kindness, patience, and understanding.

Tokyo, August 2009

Bernd Heine and Christa König

Content

Foreword

Abbreviations

1 Introduction

2 Phonology

2.1 Consonants

2.2 Vowels

2.3 Tones

3 The clause

4 The verb phrase

4.1 Verbs

4.2 Valency

4.3 Tense, aspect and modality (TAM)

4.3.1 Inflections

4.3.2 Periphrastic constructions

4.4 Negation

4.5 Imperative and deontic modality

5 The noun phrase

5.1 Nouns

5.2 Modifiers

5.2.1 Demonstratives

5.2.2 Numerals and quantifiers

5.2.2.1 Numerals

5.2.2.2 Quantifiers

5.2.3 Adjectives

5.2.4 Attributive possession

5.2.5 Relative clauses

5.3 Pronouns and person markers

5.3.1 Person markers

5.3.2 Reflexives and reciprocals

5.3.3 “Middle” voice

6 The adverbial phrase

6.1 Prepositions

6.1.1 Primary prepositions

6.1.2 Complex prepositions

- 6.2 Adverbs
- 7 Derivation
- 8 Pragmatic functions
 - 8.1 Topic
 - 8.2 Focus
- 9 Other domains
 - 9.1 Predicative possession
 - 9.2 Comparison
 - 9.3 Questions
 - 9.3.1 Polar questions
 - 9.3.2 Word questions
- 10 Clause combining
 - 10.1 Coordination
 - 10.2 Subordination
 - 10.2.1 Relative clauses
 - 10.2.2 Complement clauses
 - 10.2.3 Adverbial clauses
 - 10.3 Direct and indirect speeches
- References

Abbreviations

AC	anticausative
AP	antipassive
APOD	apodosis
BEN	benefactive
COM	comitative
COMPL	complementizer
CONJ	conjunction
DIR	direction
DIST	distal
DS	different subject
EX	exclusive
HEA	close to hearer
HORT	hortative
IMP	imperative
IMV	imperfective
IN	inclusive
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
INT	intensifier
LOC	locative
NEG	negation
O	object
OBL	obligation
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PRON	pronoun
PROT	protasis
PROX	proximal
PTC	particle
PUR	purpose
REFL	reflexive
S	subject

SBJ	subjunctive
SG	singular
SIM	similative
SS	same subject
SUBJ	subjunctive

1 Introduction

The Labwor-speaking people inhabit the Abim District¹ of Moroto Region in Northeastern Uganda (see Map). Abim, the district capital, is also the social, economic, and political center of the community. The neighbors are the (Karimojong-speaking) Jie to the east and northeast, the Acholi to the west, the Lango to the southwest, and the Teso to the south.

No reliable figure on the number of Labwor speakers is available. According to population projections carried out in 2006 (*Uganda Districts Information Handbook* 2007: 45), Abim District has a population of 53,000 people, the majority of whom must be Labwor speakers.²

As far as we were able to ascertain, the Labwor-speaking area is largely coextensive with that of Abim District. According to our consultants, the language is spoken most of all in the following villages or homesteads (*pàcɔ́*, PL *pécí*): Abilnino, Adeya, Adodi, Agile, Ainya, Ajuaci, Ajukuna, Akwanagwɛl, Alerek, Aminata, Anjwe, Arɛmboala, Aremo, Arinjobom, Ateder, Atinj, Atunja, Awac, Ayue, Bedataa, Butiwiny, Dagarɔnya, Gulɔnjɛr, Kano, Katabɔk, Katala, Kator, Kawanj, Kiru, Kɔnaacɔn, Kɔnaanyien, Kopo, Loyoroith, Nutu, Nyakwae (Nyikwae), Obɔkɛɔlot, Obolekome, Obul, Odɔɔ, Olɛm, Orɛta, Oriotiene, Orukumo, Orwamuge, Otalabar, Otumpili, Pupu, Rackoko, Wiawer (Abim Wiaweer), Wilela, and Yeriko.

Crazzolara (1960: 204-5) mentions a few Labwor clans and provides some information on them. As our consultants observed, Crazzolara's list is far from exhaustive and they gave us the following list of main clans (*kàká*, PL *kêki*), which does not appear to be comprehensive either:

<i>Name of clan</i>	<i>Name of clan members</i>
kàgá	jò-kàgá
kàkêc	jò-kàkêc
kàkòr	jò-kàkòr

¹ Abim District is a new creation; it was carved out of Kotido District in July, 2006.

² The *Uganda Districts Information Handbook* 2007 (2006: 46) claims that the people of Abim District are “Karimojong”, and their language “Ng’akarimjong”. This claim is unsubstantiated; the Karimojong living in the district, such as the Jie, Dodos, and Karimojong proper, are clearly a small minority, and Karimojong is not a major language in the district.

kàkùkú	jò-kàkùkú
kàlàjà	jò-kàlàjà
kàṅwêṭ	jò-kàṅwêṭ
kàpùrù	jò-kàpùrù
kàrúòth	jò-kàrúòth
kàfik	jò-kàfik
kòcèrò	jò-kòcèrò
kòtál	jò-kòtál
kòtùgò	jò-kòtùgò
kótùl	jò-kótùl
théṅôr	é-théṅôr

Nomenclature

In the Moroto Region outside their own community, the Labwor tend to be called *Acholi Labwor*. Storch (2004) gives *Ṭírì* as an autonym for the Labwor, and there would be reason to replace the established term Labwor by this autonym: First, this is the term invariably used for their language, as in (1), and when among themselves, the people frequently refer to themselves as *è-thír* ([èʔú:r̥], SG *thír* [ṭú:r̥]). Second, two of our three main consultants opted for Thur as their own name.

- (1) wán étúákó lép thùr.
 1.EX 1.PL.speak.IMV tongue Labwor
 'We speak Labwor.'

(2) wán ébédò (è-) jà- àbùòr.
 1.EX 1.PL.be.IMV PL- people- Labwor
 'We are Labwor people.'

án àbédò (à-) jà- àbùòr.
 1.SG 1.SG.be.IMV SG- people- Labwor
 'I am a Labwor.'

In the end, however, we decided to retain the traditional name Labwor, for the following reasons: First, this is the name used predominantly by the people themselves, as in (2), being more common than *è-thúú*. Second, this is the name that is used officially in the Abim District, and, third, any change in name such as the present one should be decided by the speakers themselves and we were not able to consult at least a larger segment of the speakers. For the time being therefore we retain the term “Labwor”, being aware that this may not be the final word on the issue.

The Labwor call their Karimojong neighbors *è-lǎk* (or *è-lókí*; SG *à-lǎk*), a term that includes the Jie, Dodos, and Karimojong proper, even if some employ this term primarily for the warrior class of the Karimojong cluster. The Acholi are called *jò-àcólí* (or *jà-àcólí*), while the Lango are called *è-théré* (SG *à-théré*) or *jò-lájí* (SG *jò-lájó*), or *jò-òmiró*, and both the Teso and the Kumam are known as *è-kúmám* (SG *à-kímám*).

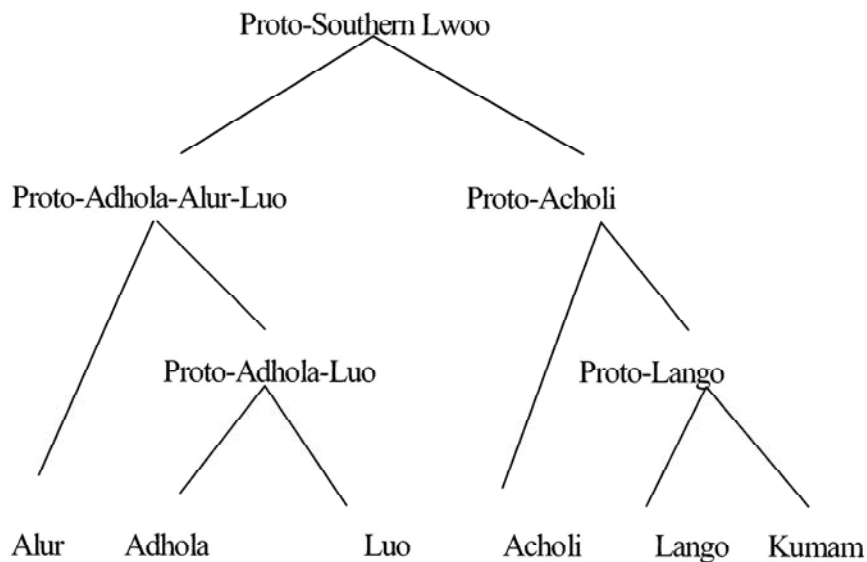
On the language

Labwor is a member of the Southern Lwoo languages, which belong to the Western Nilotic branch of the Nilotic family. The latter has been classified as belonging to the Eastern Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum, a genetic unit which was proposed by Greenberg (1963) but is not entirely uncontroversial.

Every evidence that is available suggests that the linguistic ancestors of the Labwor originate from the Nile area of the Southern Sudan, having reached East Africa in the course of the second millennium A.D. (see Blount and Curley 1970 for glottochronological datings).

The exact number of Southern Lwoo languages is not entirely clear, but the following are uncontroversial members of this genetic grouping: Acholi, Adhola, Alur, Kumam, Lango, and Luo. The genetic classification of Southern Lwoo as proposed by Heusing (2004: 361) is summarized in figure 1. Note that Heusing does not include Labwor in his treatment; as we will see below, the position of Labwor is in fact controversial.

Figure 1. The genetic classification of Southern Lwoo according to Heusing (2004: 361).



Labwor is a fairly homogeneous language; there do not appear to be any dialect or other noticeable linguistic cleavages, even if phonetic variation among speakers is quite pronounced, as we will see in chapter 2. The language is now used as a medium of instruction in the first four years of primary education, even if there are no textbooks in the language. The common practice is that teachers translate their teaching materials from English or Acholi into Labwor. Apart from a primer used in functional adult literacy and a book of prayers there are – to our knowledge – no published sources on the language. For religious instruction, the Acholi bible tends to be used.

As homogeneous as the internal structure of Labwor appears to be, its position as a language of its own has been discussed controversially. Whereas some (Ukoko, Knappert, and

van Spaandonck (1964; Ladefoged, Glick, and Criper 1972; Rottland 1981; Tucker 1994) consider it as a language of its own, others argue that it is a dialect of Acholi (Heine & Köhler 1981; Grimes 1996). For Crazzolara, on the other hand, it was classified earlier as a language (Crazzolara [1938] 1955) and later as an Acholi dialect (Crazzolara 1960).

Storch (2006: 102) calls Labwor a minority language that has retained remarkably many conservative features of Western Nilotic languages. Characteristics of noun morphology and possible borrowings from the Eastern Nilotic Karimojong language are discussed in Storch (2006), and she concludes that "... Labwor differs in crucial points from the rest of Southern Lwoo and comes much closer to Northern Lwoo typologically than e.g. Belanda Bor and Thuri. Labwor preserves classic singulatives, which may be explained by the location of Labwor, which is spoken in an area otherwise dominated by Karamojong, a language that conservatively preserves singulatives, as well. However, Labwor also has fewer innovative prefixes, and rather displays a range of common Lwoo number-inflectional suffixes instead. The lexicon tends to be mixed with many Karamojong and some Teso loans" (Storch 2004: 352).

And she also suggests that Labwor is historically unusual within the Southern Lwoo group:

A particular problem in the reconstruction of Southern Lwoo history remains, namely the classificatory status of Labwor, which shares numerous features with Northern Lwoo, such as the retention of singulatives, varied suffixes and a conservative phonology. A conclusion might be either that the ancestors of the Labwor moved into their present area later than the other Southern Lwoo groups or that their coexistence with the Karamojong resulted in a more conservative language history. (Storch 2004: 410)

It is the question of how Labwor is to be located within the typological and genetic map of Africa that motivated us to embark on field research on this language. An additional motivation was the fact that Labwor is clearly a minority language that, even if not immediately endangered, has previously been largely ignored by previous scholarship.

While the question of how Labwor is related to other Lwoo languages can only be answered on the basis of detailed grammatical and lexical comparisons, it would seem that the language is most closely related to Acholi, sharing over 90 per cent of its vocabulary with its western neighbor, and all Labwor people we consulted would insist that Labwor is fully

intelligible to them³. Nevertheless, there are both linguistic and sociolinguistic reasons to consider Labwor as a distinct language. First, there is a range of grammatical constructions – some pointed out by Storch (2004; 2006), others discussed in this study -- that have no direct equivalents in Acholi, let alone other Western Nilotic languages. And second, the Labwor themselves insist that Acholi and Labwor are different peoples and different languages and that this is supported by their contrasting oral histories and cultural institutions.

The present study

During the field research that we carried out in July, 2009, in Lotome, Moroto Region we were able to rely on the cooperation of the following mother tongue speakers of Labwor who served as our main consultants on the language:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Profession</i>	<i>Place of birth</i>	<i>Languages known (other than mother tongue)</i>
Aballa John Thompson	32	Teacher	Abim	English, little Karimojong
Ociero Timothy	38	Reverend	Atuɲa	English
Okot Charles	30	Teacher	Katabok	English, little Karimojong
Omara Julius	30	Teacher	Alerɛk	English, little Karimojong
Sewanga Oɲom	26	Reverend	Katabok	English

The present study is meant to make a little known language more readily accessible to people outside the Labwor community. The study can achieve no more than presenting a skeleton of the grammatical shape of the language; it is sketchy in a number of different ways, most of all in the following. First, we were not able to carry out a tonal analysis of the language; rather, we are writing tonal distinctions as they were marked in our data. Tone is an essential property of the grammar of all Nilotic languages; for detailed tonal analyses on Southern Lwoo languages, see especially Noonan (1992) for Lango, Tucker (1993) for Luo, and Heusing (1993) for comparative Southern Lwoo.

³ Whether Acholi people understand Labwor in the same way as vice versa is a question that we were not able to answer.

Second, our treatment of phonology rests on a few general observations of its salient characteristics; a thorough phonetic and phonological analysis is urgently required. And third, we are not able to do justice to the complex system of verbal inflections and derivations, which one might be tempted to call the core of Labwor grammar. Time was simply not enough to record and describe all the various paradigms that need to be distinguished in order to understand the morphophonology of the language. We nevertheless hope that this study will be of use both to the community of Labwor speakers and to the student of Nilotic languages and of linguistic typology. Most of all, it is meant to encourage research on a comprehensive grammar of Labwor.