Some Basic Facts about the Dholuo Language

1.   Genetic Grouping and Related Languages

Dholuo (/ d̪ð́ólúô /) (or 'Luo') is a language from the <u>Nilo-Saharan</u> language family.

- Dholuo = dhó lúô = speech of the Luo

(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-Sarahan > 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. Thus, it is by no means an endangered language.

However, it is a minority language, in the sense that speakers are under great economic and social pressure to speak either English or Swahili.

Consequently, as noted by Tucker (1994), the language has undergone certain 'shifts' as a result of influence from Swahili. Indeed, the dialect described by Tucker (1994) is more indicative of older speakers of the language (he did his fieldwork in the 1960's).

Perhaps due to these issues, there is relatively little linguistic scholarship on Dholuo, and what literature there is can be somewhat inaccessible:
   • Out-of-print grammars and dictionaries (mainly for language learners)
   • Various articles in out-of-the-way journals.
   • **Major works by Omondi (1982), Tucker (1994), and Okoth-Okombo (1997)**

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.
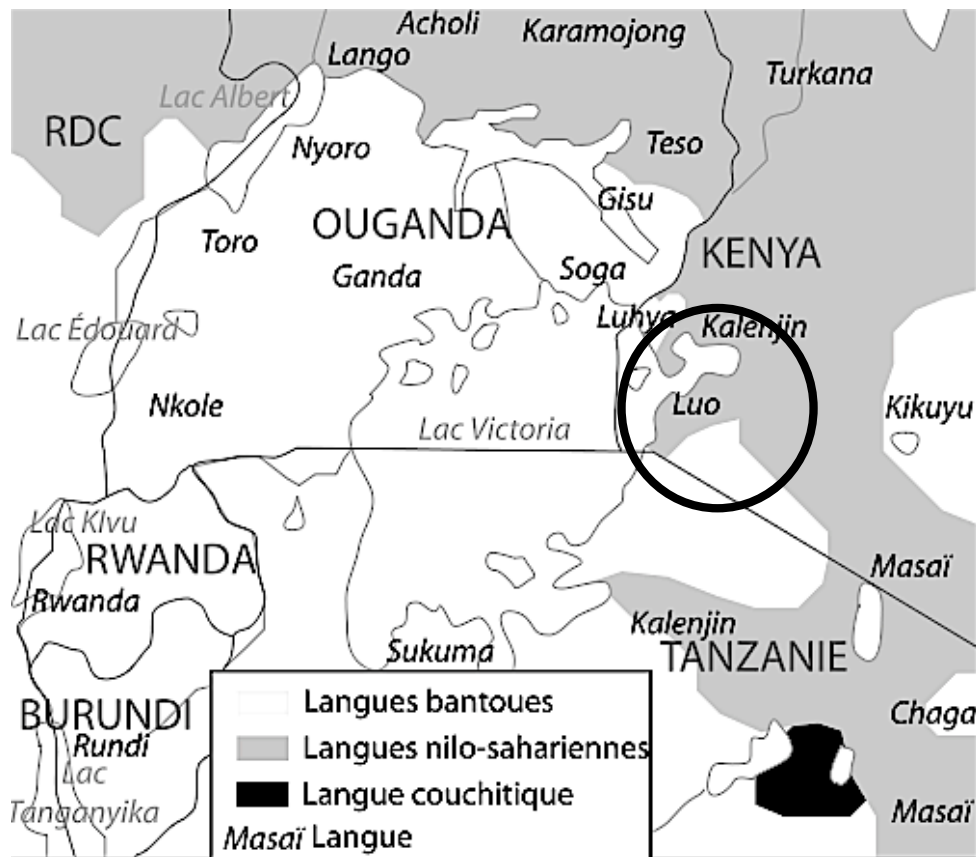

Image taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Image-Languages-Lakevictoria-fr.svg

4.   **Phonological Inventory and Orthography**

- There is a Roman orthography for Dholuo which is entirely phonemic, and which keeps remarkably close to IPA.

- We will transcribe all our Dholuo data using this orthography.

- Transcription in IPA is also permitted (and encouraged), but is entirely optional. (*This is in keeping with the perspective that this is more a class on Dholuo than it is on 'field methods'*).

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).

	IPA	Dholuo Orthography	Example (in D.O.)
Bilabial:			
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'
Labio-Dental:			
fricative	/ f /	f	fúó 'stupid'
Dental:			
voiceless affricate (stop?)	/ t͡θ /	th	thûl 'snake'
voiced affricate (stop?)	/ d͡ð /	dh	dhok 'mouth'
prenasalized affricate (stop?)	/ nd͡ð /	ndh	ndhíayó 'far'

	IPA	Dholuo Orthography	Example

Alveolar:

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'

Palatal:

voiceless stop (affricate?)	/ c /	ch	chak 'milk'
voiced stop (affricate?)	/ ɟ /	j	ji 'people'
nasal stop	/ ɲ /	ny	nyakó 'girl'
prenasalized stop	/ ɲɟ /	nj	njofní 'tapeworm'
glide	/ j /	y	.yath 'tree,medicine'

Velar:

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'

Glottal:

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: / ạ /

- In IPA, a "-ATR" vowel is indicate with the following sub-script: / ạ /

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

(2)   **The Vowel Space of Dholuo**

		FRONT	**CENTRAL**	**BACK**
HIGH	**+ATR**	ị		ụ
	-ATR	ị		ụ
MID	**+ATR**	ẹ		ọ
	-ATR	ẹ		ọ
LOW	**+ATR**		ạ	
	-ATR		ạ	

4.2.1   What is "ATR"?

(a)   "ATR" stands for "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, 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.

Thus, you may sometimes hear the following rough equivalences in the vowel sounds of Dholuo:

/ i̧ /	::	/ i /
/ i̧ /	::	/ ɪ /
/ ẹ /	::	/ e /
/ ẹ /	::	/ ɛ /
/ ạ /	::	/ æ /
/ ạ /	::	/ a /
/ ụ /	::	/ u /
/ ụ /	::	/ ʊ /
/ ọ /	::	/ o /
/ ọ /	::	/ ɔ /

However, these are only rough (and unstable) similarities. Indeed, the quality of the ATR-value seems to be greatly affected by stress and/or tone. **You will often times have great difficulty hearing whether a given vowel is "+ATR" or "- ATR".**

(3)   **Some Illustrative ATR Contrasts**

	IPA	Dholuo Orthography
High Front Vowels		
+ATR	/ wi̧c /	wich 'head'
-ATR	/ i̧c /	.ich 'stomache'
Mid Back Vowels		
+ATR	/ cọ́gọ́ /	chógó 'bone'
-ATR	/ mọ́gọ́ /	.mógó 'flour'
High Back Vowels		
+ATR	/ bụ̀r /	bur 'hole'
-ATR	/ bụ̀r /	.bur 'boil'
Mid Front Vowels		
+ATR	/ ạ̀dệk /	adêk 'three'
-ATR	/ lẹ̀p /	.lep 'tongue'
Low Central Vowels		
+ATR	/ bạ́ọ́ /	báó 'wood'
-ATR	/ tạ́ọ́ /	.táó '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!

> (4) **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 Diphthongs

Dholuo possesses a variety of diphthongs. Some of the most common are illustrated below:

(5) **Some Diphthongs in Dholuo**

	IPA	Dholuo Orthography	
a.	/ l̪ i̯ɛ̀t /	liet	'hot'
b.	/ d̪ð̯i̯àŋ /	dhiàng'	'cow'
c.	/ gṳɛ̀nɔ̀ /	.gueno	'hen'
d.	/ mṳ̀àndà̀ /	muanda	'antelope'
e.	/ cṵ́ɔ̀ /	.chúo	'men'

4.3   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:

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

		IPA	Dholuo Orthography	
a.	High:	/ mǫ́n /	món	'women'
b.	Low:	/ lǜm /	lum	'grass'
c.	Falling:	/ ɲậɲậ /	.nyânyâ	'tomato'
d.	Rising:	/ lǎw /	lǎw	'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.

(7)   **Caveat 1: Allotones**

Besides these four 'tonemes', Tucker (1994) also distinguishes a variety of allotones.

(i)	Extra High	(allotone of H)
(ii)	Extra Low	(allotone of L)
(iii)	Downstepped High	(allotone of H)
(iv)	Downstepped Falling	(allotone of Falling)
(v)	Extra High Falling	(allotone of Falling)
(vi)	Low Falling ('Decending')	(allotone of Falling)
(vii)	'Undulating'	(allotone of Falling)

(8)   **Caveat 2:**

By everyone's accounts, *tonal distinctions are very hard to hear in this language!*

"…tonal values are not clear cut, and are often hard to catch." (Tucker 1994: 43)

"The tones have no fixed musical values, but vary enormously according to speaker, occasion or context." (Tucker 1994: 45)

"Owing to…the great influence Downdrift has on Luo speech in general, the determining of Tonemes presents great difficulties to the investigator. Very often, the Basic Tone Pattern of a word can only be found out by studying the word in many contexts as well as in isolation..." (Tucker 1994: 323)

(9)   **Some General Issues in the Realization of Tone**

      a.   H-tone is not very high, especially when unstressed.
           (Tucker 1994: 46)

      b.   There is strong 'Downdrift' in disyllables. A final high H-tone in a polysyllabic word is very hard to distinguish from L.
           (Tucker 1994: 46)

      c.   A 'downstepped' H-tone is easily confused with L.
           (Tucker 1994: 46)

      d.   The fall in a Falling contour tone can be extremely short, and for some speakers is hardly perceptible at all. It is easily confused with L.
           (Tucker 1994: 47)

      e.   In my own experience, I can only (barely) distinguish tone in stressed syllables. I myself uniformly perceive all unstressed syllables to be L.

Despite the great difficulties in perceiving tonal melodies in Dholuo, we will try our best.
You should make your best-faith effort to mark tones where you think you hear them.
      (but, at the same time, don't beat yourself up over this…)

4.5   Stress

The stress system of Dholuo is not discussed much in the extant literature. It seems to be relatively straightforward.
- The foot is trochaic
- Assignment of feet is L-to-R
- Main stress falls on the left-most foot
- Prefixes are extrametrical

That is, main stress is assigned to the first syllable of the root (skipping over any prefixes), and every other syllable thereafter receives secondary stress.

4.6   Vowel Length

Although vowel length is not phonemic in Dholuo, there are cases where hiatus resolution (in fast speech) produces long vowels at the surface. When we encounter these, we will indicate long vowels via a colon (*a* vs. *a:*)

        i:mîel   <   a   imîel
                                     PST you.dance
                                     You danced.

5.   **A Few Very Basic Grammatical Structures**

So that we don't start out completely from 'square one' in our study of the language's grammar, I have sketched below some very basic information on three fundamental areas of the language's grammar:
- Basic word order in declarative clauses
- Subject and object 'agreement / clitics'
- Basic structure of DPs

5.1   **Basic Sentence Structure (of a Declarative Clause)**

XP <u>SUBJECT</u> YP <u>VERB</u> <u>OBJECT</u> ZP

- XP = things which can precede the subject (some adverbs, *etc.*)
- YP = things which can follow the subject (some adverbs, negation, *etc.*)
- ZP = things which can follow the object (some adverbs, obliques, *etc.*)

(11)   **Illustrative Example**

Ochîeng' .nene onyéwo .búk ni .Pámbá.

Ochieng   earlier   bought   book   for   Pamba
Earlier, Ochieng bought a book for Pamba.

5.2   **Agreement / Pronominal Clitics on the Verb**

5.2.1   **Subjects**

If the subject is a local person, the verb is 'marked' with one of a set of prefixes (proclitics?).

(14)   **Local Person Subject Markers**

   a.   **a**mîel   *I am dancing*   b.   **wa**mîel   *we are dancing*

   c.   **i**mîel   *You are dancing*   d.   **u**mîel   *you (pl) are dancing*

If the subject is a third person *pronoun*, then the paradigm of 'subject marking' is as follows:

(15)   **Third Person Subject Markers**

   a.   **o**mîel   *He is dancing.*   b.   **gi**mîel   *They are dancing*

If the subject is full DP, then no 'subject marker' appears on the verb.

(16)   **No Subject Marker When the Subject is a full DP**

Ochîeng' mîel.

Ochieng is dancing.

5.2.2 Objects

If the object is a local person, the verb is marked with one of a set of suffixes (enclitics?)

(15) **Local Person Object Markers**

    a.   Ohér**a**   *She loves me.*   b.   Ohéro**wa**   *She loves us.*

    c.   Ohér**i**   *She loves you (sg).*   d.   Ohéro**u**   *She loves you (pl).*

If the object is a third person *pronoun*, then the paradigm of 'object marking' is as follows:

(16) **Third Person Object Markers**

    a.   Ohér**e**   *She loves him.*   b.   Ohéro**gi**   *She loves them.*

If the object is a full DP, then no 'object marker' appears on the verb.

(17) **No Object Marker When the Object is a full DP**
    Ohéro Pamba.
    She loves Pamba.

(18) **Overarching Analytic Question**
    Are these 'markers' best analyzed as Agreement, or as pronominal clitics?

5.3 Basic Structure of the DP

    Noun   Possessor   Relative-Clause/Adjective/Numerals   Demonstrative   Quantifier

(19) **Illustrative Examples**

    a.   osiép   Ochiéng'   ma   oti   nî
            friend   Ochieng   MA   old   this
            This old friend of Ochieng.

    b.   guóge   gî   duto
            dogs   these   all
            All of these dogs

    c.   rainge   gî   moko
            collars   these   some
            Some of these collars.

5.3.1   The Particle *Ma*

Both relative clauses and adjectives are preceded by the particle *ma*.

(20)   **The Particle *Ma* in NP Modification**

     a.   osiép Ochiéng' **ma oti**   nî
          friend Ochieng **MA old**   this
          This old friend of Ochieng.

     b.   guók **ma .mór**   nî
          dog   **MA happy** this
          This happy dog

     c.   nyáko **ma**   **amío** **ng'ech**
          girl   MA I.give   monitor.lizard
          The girl I gave a monitor lizard

This particle also appears in many other constructions, including many adverbials.

(21)   **The Particle *Ma* in Adverbial Modification**
     Adhî **ma .bér**
     I.go   MA good
     I am doing well.

5.3.2   Possessor Agreement / Pronominal Clitics on the Noun

If the possessor of a N is a local person, then the N is marked with one of a set of suffixes (enclitics?)

(22)   **Local Person Possessive Markers**

     a.   guóg**a**   *my dog*   b.   guóg**wa**   *our dog*
     c.   guóg**i**   *your dog*   d.   guóg**u**   *your (pl) dog*

If the possessor is a third person *pronoun*, then the paradigm of 'object marking' is as follows:

(23)   **Third Person Possessive Markers**

     a.   guóg**e**   *his dog*   b.   guóg**gi**   *their dog*

If the possessor is a full DP, then no 'possessive marker' appears on the noun.

(24)   **No Possessive Marker When the Possessor is a full DP**
     guóg Pamba
     Pamba's dog.

5.3.3 Consonant Mutation in Possessives

If a N is directly followed by either a possessive marker or a full DP possessor, then certain phonological changes can take place to the N. Note, for example, that in isolation the word for 'dog' is *guók* (20b). However, in the possessive examples above, the final consonant of the root becomes voiced, yielding *guóg* (24).

The following chart provides some other examples of this kind of 'consonant mutation':

(25)   **Some Examples of Consonant Mutation in Possessives**

Bare Form	Possessed Form	
chógó *bone*	chók-	*voiced C becomes voiceless*
.lep *tongue*	.lew-	*/p/ becomes /w/*
.táó *dish*	táp	*rounded vowel (/w/) becomes p*
bul *drum*	bund-	*/l/ becomes /nd/*
.olemo *fruit*	olemb-	*nasal becomes prenasalized stop*
.rech *fish*	.rey-	*palatal affricate becomes glide*
.taya *lamp*	tach-	*palatal glide becomes affricate*

Such consonant mutation is actually a relatively well-known and widely-discussed feature of Dholuo and its immediate relatives. It occurs not only in possessives, but also in plurals and a few other, verbal constructions.

Not all possessives are formed via C-mutation. In some cases, the possessive form of the N is simply irregular.

(26)   **Some Irregular Possessive Forms**

Bare Form	Possessed Form
chi *wife*	chiég-
ji *people*	jog
.wuoro *father*	.wuon-

Moreover, Dholuo has an alternative way of forming possessives, one that does not trigger the C-mutation seen above. This separate possessive construction makes use of a special possessive 'linker', which is *mar* (sg) or *mag* (pl).

(26)   **Periphrastic Possessive Construction**

    a.   guók mar Pamba   *Pamba's dog*

    b.   guók mara   *My dog*