

# Chitumbuka Grammar

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Chitumbuka is a language spoken by about half a million people living in northern Malawi and northeastern Zambia. The vocabulary varies a lot from location to location. I learned some Chitumbuka in Mzuzu. The grammar was explained to me by Fr. Dr. John Ryan. Any mistakes are my own.

## Vocabulary (just enough to explain the grammar)

kuli = to be	kuli na = to have
kuni = to be (when things are equal)	kuruta = to go
kukhala = to remain	kuchita = to do or to make
kupa = to give	kusambizga = to teach
kukumana = to meet	kununkira = to smell good
kukhumba = to want	kusanga = to find
kurya = to eat	ku = to (the preposition)
sono = now	-moza = one
-weme = good	-kulu = big
makora = well	chomene = very
town = town	ine = I (emphatic, or not with a verb)
ndine = I (emphatic)	iwe = you (emphatic, or not with a verb)
ndimwe = you (emphatic)	iye = he/she (emphatic, or not with a verb)
Also yula = he/she (perhaps the difference depends on whether the person is near or far).	
mPANDO (mi) = chair	chAKA (vy) = year
NKHUNI () = firewood	MWEZI () = month
NYUMBA () = house	chaKURYA = food
LIBWE (ma) = rock	muNTHU (wa) = person
muRONDA (?) = guard	

## Pronouns used before verbs

Singular	Plural
ni	ti
u/mu	mu
wa	wa

ni- = I

u- = you (singular) for children and friends

mu- = you (singular) for adults, formal

wa- = he/she (not it)

ti- = we

mu- = you (plural)

wa- = they (this w is pronounced between w and v)

## Present tense verbs

In the present tense, verbs (other than kuli and kuli na) are used in the infinitive with the prefix ku. The pronoun ni is shortened to n (except with kuli and kuli na). For example *I go, you go*, etc. is nkuruta, ukuruta, mukuruta, wakuruta, tikuruta, mukuruta, wakuruta. So the prefixes to the verb are

Singular	Plural
nku-	tiku-
uku-/muku-	muku-
waku-	waku-

The exceptions are *I am, you are, ...* and *I have, you have, ...* which are nili, uli, .... and nili na, uli na, ....

## Various past tenses

### Immediate past

If something has just happened (or even is about to happen) you use the prefixes

na-	ta-
wa-	mwa-
wa-	wa-

So *naruta* means *I just went* or even *I'm going now*. Also *nakhala sono mwezi yumoza* means *I have been here one month*.

### Finished earlier today past

If you did something earlier today, and you have completed it, you use the prefixes

nangu-	tangu-
wangu-	mwangu-
wangu-	wangu-

So *nanguruta ku town* means *I went to town (and I'm back)*.

### Simple past before today

If you have done something before today and it is completed you use the prefixes

nika-	tika-
uka-/muka-	muka-
waka-	waka-

So *wakaruta Lilongwe* means *she went to Lilongwe (and she's back)*. Irregular: *I was* is *nkava*, *I had* is *nkava na*.

### Present perfect

In the present perfect you use the prefixes

niliku-	tiliku-
uliku-/muliku-	muliku-
waliku-	waliku-

So *nilikuruta* means *I have gone*.

## Future (here)

pronoun + verb stem without final vowel + enge,

*I will stay* is *nikhalenge*, *you will teach* is *musambizyenge*, *he will do* is *wakuchitalenge*, *I will meet* is *nikumanenge*

## Future (there)

namchita I will do it (there)

tamkumana we will meet (somewhere else)

Singular	Plural
nam	tam
wam	mwam
wam	w(v)am

## Not yet

pronoun + nda + verb stem without final vowel + e. So *I have not yet found* or *before I found* is *nindasangkhe*.

## Imperative

verb stem + ni. So *Go!* would be *rutani!*

**Adverbs from verbs** Add *mwa* + infinitive. So *I am eating late* would be *nkurya mwakuchedwa*.

**li/ni** *ni* is *equals*, *li* is *to be*. *Ni li makora* = *I am well*, *yula ni munthu muweme chomene* = *he's a very good person*

## Emphatic pronouns

There is more than one way to emphasize a pronoun.

To emphasize that it is *I* who did something, you could say *nkuchita ine* or *ndine kuchita*.

## Questions

If a question does not have a question word *who*, *what*, *where*, ... then you put *kasi* at the front of the question.

## Negation

You negate a verb by putting *yayi* after the verb.

## If/then

*pala* ... *un/u*

## Noun classes

	Singular			Plural	
noun	adj	particle	noun	adj	particle
ch/chi-	chi-	cha	vy/vi-	vi-	vya
m/mu-	u-	wa-	mi-	yi-	ya
m/mu-	mu-	wa-	ŵa-	ŵa-	ŵa
-	li-	la	ma-	gha-	gha
-	yi-	ya	-	zi-	za

*years* is *vyaka*. *chairs* is *mipando*. *people* is *ŵanthu*. *rocks* is *malibwe*. *houses* is *nyumba*.  
*one year* is *chaka chimoza*. *good years* is *vyaka viweme*.  
*big chair* is *mpando ukulu*. *big chairs* is *mipando yikulu*.  
*good person* is *munthu muweme*. *good people* is *ŵanthu ŵaweme*.  
*big rock* is *libwe likulu*. *big rocks* is *malibwe ghakulu*.  
*big house* is *nyumba yikulu*. *big houses* is *nyumba zikulu*.

Noun1 of Noun2. The 'of' is the particle associated to noun1. So the guard's house is *nyumba ya muronda*.

If a verb modifies a noun (not a pronoun) use the adjective prefix. So *the food smells good* is *chakurya chikununkira*.

For a possessive word (like my) use the particle. So *my food smells good* would be *chakurya chane chikununkira*.

## Possessive

A word like my/your/his comes after the noun.

my: -ane

your: -inu

his/her/its: -awo

our: -ithu

The prefix is the prefix for the possessive in the above chart. So *my house* is *nyumba yane*. *mpando wane* is *my chair*. To emphasize that it is mine you say *mpando ngwane*.

## That as conjunction

Use the word *kuti*. So *I don't want you to go* is *nkukhumba yayi kuti mukuruta*.

## Odds and ends

ukunipa = you give me.

nikukupa = I give you where the second ku is the singular second person in the direct object, but is actually only used with children.

nikumupani = I give you where the mu - ni is the plural second person in the direct object, but is also used with a single adult.

tawonga kuvwira = thank you for helping. The (*for*) is omitted.

nkulindizga taxi = I am waiting for a taxi. The (*for*) is omitted.