

Linguistic Description of Gitemi

Gitemi is spoken by about 30,000 people, most of whom live in the Ngorongoro district of the Arusha region in northern Tanzania. According to *The Classification of Bantu Languages* (Guthrie, 1948), Gitemi was classified as an E40 Language, thus belonging to the languages at the Eastern side of Lake Victoria. Among these it most closely resembles Kiikoma and Kiikizu. Later, in *Comparative Bantu* (1971), Gitemi was reassigned to the E50 languages of central Kenya; namely, Gikuyu, Kikamba, and Kitharaka. As of today, only one comprehensive linguistic description of the Gitemi language has been published (Nurse & Rottland, 1991).

In the *Ethnologue* (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/soz>) Gitemi was once again reassigned as E46. There it is listed under the alternate language name ‘Temi,’ where it is also referred to as ‘Kisonjo.’ The language is classed as vigorous.

1. Phonology

1.1 Vowels

Gitemi has seven phonemic vowels; /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /o/, /ɔ/, /u/. Final vowels are often devoiced at the end of a sentence or phrase

	Front/Unrounded	Back/Rounded
Close	i	u
Close Mid	e	o
Mid	ɛ	ɔ
Open	a	

1.1.1 Vowel harmony

Vowel harmony has been found to occur between two sets of vowels, with /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ appearing concurrently, and likewise with /e/ and /o/ within a stem or word. Also, the infinitive marker is /e-/ when followed by stems containing /o/, /i/, or /u/. It is /ɛ-/ before stems with /ɛ/ or /ɔ/.

Note these examples of minimal pairs;

Gitemi	English
ekola	to grow (intr.)
ɛkɔla	to happen upon, to meet with
etoola	to live
ɛtɔla	to take, to pick up

1.1.2 Vowel length

Phonemic vowel length has been established, with several sets of contrastive pairs;

Gitemi example	English	Gitemi example	English
εγεερα	to go	εγερα	to measure
etoola	to live	etola	to puncture, make a hole in
emiisa	to bless	emisa	to faint, lose consciousness

Furthermore, there is compensatory lengthening of the vowel preceding a pre-nasalized consonant, as in /ba:ntu/.

1.2 Consonants

1.21 Gitemi has the following consonant system;

		Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	Voiceless	b	t		k	
	Voiced		d		g	
Fricative	Voiceless		s	ʃ	χ	h
Affricate				ɖʒ		
Nasal		m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Flap			r			
Glide		w	y			
Lateral approximant			l	ʎ		

1.22 Dahl's law is active throughout Gitemi, both in verb and noun conjugations. Note that Dahl's law effects a change in the prefix from /ki-/ to /gi-/ when the stem begins with a voiceless consonant.

Prefix with voiceless consonant	Gitemi example	English
ki (language marker, cl 7)	gitemi	language of the Batemi

+ temi		
ki + gamba (talk)	kigamba	language
ka (diminutive cl 12) + tojo	gatojo	hare
ka + mwana (child)	kamwana	small child, infant

1.23 As a summary, the following table shows all Gitemi phonemes and their orthographic representations;

Gitemi phonemes	Orthographic representation	Gitemi phonemes	Orthographic representation
/a/	a	/ɲ/	ny
/b/	b	/ŋ/	ng'
/d/	d	/o/	o
/e/	e	/ɔ/	ɔ
/ɛ/	ɛ	/r/	r
/g/	g	/s/	s
/h/	h	/ʃ/	sy
/i/	i	/t/	t
/dʒ/	j	/u/	u
/k/	k	/w/	w
/l/	l	/X/	gh
/m/	m	/y/	y

/n/	n	/k/	yy
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2. Nouns

Below is a review of the seventeen noun classes found in Gitemi.

2.1 Classes 1&2

Classes 1 & 2 comprise primarily humans.

Class	Prefix	Gitemi example	English
1 (singular)	m-, mo, mu-	monto	person
2 (plural)	ba-	bantu	people
1	mu-	mulakolo	old man, elder
2	ba-	balakolo	old men, elders

2.2 Classes 3 & 4

Most plants and farming terms are in Classes 3 & 4.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
3 (singular)	mu-	mugonda	field
4 (plural)	mi-	migonda	fields
3	mu-	mute	tree
4	mi-	mite	trees

2.2 Classes 5 & 6

Classes 5 & 6 have non-count nouns, liquids, and some body parts.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
5 (singular)	-	ghuseri	meeting
6 (plural)	ma-	maghuseri	meetings
6	ma-	mariba	milk
5	e-	eguha	bone
6	ma-	maguha	bones

2.4 Classes 7 & 8

Inanimate objects fall into classes 7 & 8.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
7 (singular)	ki-	kintɔ	thing
8 (plural)	bi-	bintɔ	things
7	gi-	gikobo	calabash for beer
8	bi-	bikobo	calabashes for beer

2.5 Classes 9 & 10

Animals and loanwords fall into these categories. Singular and plural are only distinguished by surrounding words occurring in agreement with them.

Class	prefix	Gitemi example	English
9 (singular)	n-	ndikele emwε	one donkey
10 (plural)	n-	ndikele ebele	two donkeys
9	-	penseli emwε	one pencil
10	-	penseli janeni	many pencils

2.6 Class 11

Class 11 has relatively few nouns, with plurals being formed in either class 10 or 6.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
11	lo-	lohyo	knife
10	n-	ng'hyo	knives
11	lo-	lohe	palm of the hand
6	ma-	mahe	palms of the hand

2.7 Class 12

Class 12 is the diminutive, which is readily formed with noun stems from most other noun Classes.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
12	ka-	kabaga	kitten (cat, cl. 9)
12	ka-	kabwε	small rock (rock, cl. 5)

12	ka-	kamwana	small child (child, cl. 1)
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2.8 Class 14

Class 14 represents the abstract nouns, and is often formed by adding /bu-/ to the noun or verb stems.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
14	bu-	bughamela	joy (verb: 'eghamela' to rejoice)
14	bu-	Butemine	the valley of the Temi people
14	bu-	bubaana	childhood (noun: 'baana' children)

2.9 Classes 15-17

Classes 15, 16, and 17 are locative classes. The prefixes are primarily adjoined to adverbial Locatives.

Class	concordance	Gitemi example	English
15	ku-/ gu-	kulehu	far away
16	ha-	hantu	a place
17	ko-/go-	gokyo	over there

3.The Verb

3.1 Verb structure

Verbs in Gitemi may be formed with up to three prefixes and up to four suffixes after the root, though not all affixes can be combined within a single word.

The following examples show the longest possible variation, as well as the shortest;

Example 1:

(subj.) (tense) (object) ROOT (suffix1) (suffix2)

tu- ba- mu- jock - eri- a .
 1P- PRES- OBJ3S- return- prepositional- neutral
 'We have brought him back.'

Example 2: ROOT (suffix)

ger- a
 go- neutral
 'go' (command)

3.2 Agreement for the subject is as follows;

1 st p. sing	n/ ni-	1 st p. plural	tu-/ du-
2 nd p. sing	o-/ o-	2 nd p. plural	m-/mu-
3 rd p. sing	a-	3 rd p. plural	ba-

3.3 Tense markers occur as prefixes between the subject marker and the stem;

Present	-ba-
Future	-ke- /-kε-
Past	-aa-
Present perfect	-a-
Consecutive	-ka-
Negative	-ti-
Negative present perfect 'not yet'	-tanti-
Negative future 'will not'	-timune-

3.4 Object markers, often inserted for emphasis, come immediately before the stem.

1 st p. sing	n-, ni-
2 nd p. sing	-ku-, -gu-
3 rd p. sing	-mu-
1 st p. plural	-tu-
2 nd p. plural	-mu-
3 rd p. plural	-ba-

3.5 Derivations

Derivations immediately follow the stem, often changing it through morphophonemic processes.

Derivation type	suffix	Gitemi example	English
Causative	-i-	ehela	to burn (intr.)
		eherya	to burn (trans.)

Prepositional	-el-	ebuga	to speak
		ebugela	to call to someone
Reciprocal	-an-	ebela	to tell
		ebelana	to tell one another, discuss
Passive	-w-	ebyala	to give birth
		ebyalwa	to be born
Reversive	-ol-	ehinga	to close
		ehingola	to open

3.6 Final suffix

The final suffix marks the aspect of the verb;

Aspect	Suffix	Gitemi example	English
Neutral mode	-a	eruga	to cook
Habitual	-aga	erugaga	to habitually cook
Perfective	-ire	arugire	she cooked
Continuous	-ate	arugate	she is cooking
Subjunctive	-e/ -ε	aruge	she should cook

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