



## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHICHEWA LANGUAGE





# MALAWI



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Chichewa language is spoken in almost all parts of Malawi. There are several other languages and dialects spoken in different regions for instance, Chitumbuka, Chiyao, Chilomwe, Chitonga, Chisena, Chilambia and Chinkhonde. It should be emphasized here that the basic grammatical structure is almost the same for all the languages. The difference is in terms of vocabulary, intonations and pronunciation. As for the Chichewa alphabet, some letters do not exist i.e. “Q” and “X”. The letter “C” always carries an “H”. This short introduction is designed to give you a glimpse of what the Chichewa Language is like before you arrive in Malawi.

# LESSON 1: Chichewa Alphabet

## Vowels

Chichewa language has only 5 vowel sounds: a, e, I, o and u pronounced as follows:

A Sounds as in the English word: Father.

Examples: Kaya (what about), Ana (children).

E sounds as in the English word; made, weigh.

Examples: bwera (come), chemwali (sister).

I sounds as in the English word; Easy.

Examples: ichi (this), liti (when)

O sounds, as in the English word: only, over.

Examples: moni (hello), Zikomo (thank you)

U sounds, as in the English word: food

Examples: uchi (honey) ulimi (farming)

## DIFFICULT SOUNDS IN THE ALPHABET (-Ng`o- , -Ng`a- and -psya)

<p>-Ng`o- Pang`ono (little)</p>	<p>-Ng`a- Yang`ana (look)</p>	<p>-psya Kuwopsya (to be dangerous)</p>
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## LESSON 2: Greetings

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
Hello	Moni!
What's up?	Zikuyenda bwanji?
Nothing special	Palibe chapadera
You are how? (How are you?)	Muli bwanji?
I'm ok and you?	Ndili bwino kaya inu?.
You are most welcome	Mwalandilidwa!
See you later	Tiwonana
Thanks	Zikomo!
Sorry	Chonde pepani!
<b>Specific Greetings (morning)</b>	
You woke up how? (How did you wake up?)	Mwadzuka bwanji?
I woke up well, what about you?	Ndadzuka bwino kaya inu?
I woke up well too thank you	Ndadzuka bwinonso zikomo
<i>Afternoon</i>	
You spent the day how?	Mwaswela bwanji?
I spent the day well what about you?	Ndaswela bwino kaya inu?
I spent the day well too, thank you	Ndaswela bwinonso zikomo
<b>General Greetings</b>	
How was the night?	Usiku unali bwanji?
The night was good thank you	Usiku unali bwino zikomo

How was the day?	Tsiku linali bwanji?
The day was good thank you	Tsiku linali bwino zikomo
How is your father?	Abambo anu ali bwanji?
My father is fine thanks	Abambo anga ali bwino zikomo

### LESSON 3: Introductions

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
What is your name?	Dzina lanu ndani?
My name is Cedric and yours?	Dzina langa ndi Susan .
Happy to meet you!	Ndakondwa kukumana ndi inu
Happy to meet you too!	Ndakondwa kukumananso ndi inu
Where are you from?	Mumachokera kuti?
. I am from USA.	Ndimachokera ku USA
What is your job? / What do you do?	Mumagwira ntchito yanji?
I do work of a volunteer	Ndimagwira ntchito yodzipereka
I learning to speak Chichewa	Ndikuphunzira kulankhula chichewa
Where will you stay?	Mudzakhala kuti?
I will stay in Dedza	Ndidzakhala ku Dedza
Thanks see you later	Zikomo tiwonana

## LESSON 4: Family

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
Family	Banja
Father	Bambo
Mother	Mayi
Brother	Achimwene
Sister	Achemwali
Grand father	Agogo amuna
Grand mother	Agogo akazi
Children	Ana
To be married	Kukwatira/kukwatiwa
Single child	Mwana m`modzi
Twins	Mapasa
Boy/girlfriend	Chibwenzi
My friend	Mzanga
To be separated	Kulekana
To have	Kukhala ndi
Uncle	Amalume
Aunt	Azakhali
How is your family?	Banja lanu lili bwanji?
Our family is fine thank you	Banja lathu lili bwino zikomo

## LESSON 5: Basic Sentence Structures

### Personal Pronoun Subject

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
I	Ndi-
You (formal)	Mu-
He/She	A-
We /us	Ti-
You (informal)	U-
They	A-

All these personal pronouns are used as subject prefixes in a sentence. Note that “**a**” can be used in contexts as “*he/she*” or “*they*” and that “**u**” is not commonly used in Chichewa if anything you only use it when addressing young ones.

### Sentence Construction

First Subject Prefix		Second (Tense Markers)(Infix)		Third (Verb)		Put It Together	
Ndi	I	-Ku-	Now Infinitive	Kupita	To go	Ndikupita	I am going
Mu	You	-Ma-	Always Happens	Kudya	To eat	mumadya	You always eat
Ti	We	-Na-	Happened Already	Kudzuka	To woke up	Tinadzuka	We woke up

A structural summary in Chichewa is that when you are conjugating a verb, you drop the infinitive **-ku-** except only when you are using it as **-ku-** now infinitive (Tense marker) and the summary goes like this;

SP + TM + ROV= one word

Subject prefix + tense marker (infix) + root of the verb (after dropping the “ku”

### Negative Sentence Structure

Negation	Verb	Add it on	
Si- Prefix	Kudya to eat	Sindimadya nyama	I don't eat rice
	Kumwa to drink	Simumamwa madzi	You don't drink water
	Kukonda to like	Samakonda coke	He doesn't like coke
	Kusangalala to Happy	Sakusangalala	She is not happy

Two vowel do not follow each other in Chichewa hence the contraction of *Si + a*  
+ Kusangalala = Sakusangalala so too with  
Si + a + Kukonda = Samakonda



## LESSON 6: Basic Needs

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
I am tired.	Ndatopa
I am hungry.	Ndili ndi njala
I am full.	Ndakhuta
I am thirsty	. Ndili ndi ludzu
Where is the toilet?	Chimbudzi chili kuti?
I want to drink water	Ndikufuna kumwa madzi.
I want to sleep.	Ndikufuna kugona
I want to eat	. Ndikufuna kudya
I am feeling hot	Ndikumva kutentha
I am feeling cold	Ndikumva kuzizira
Toilet	Chimbudzi
Shower room	Bafa
I want to bathe	Ndikufuna kusamba
I don't like meat.	Sindimakonda nyama
How do you say .....in Chichewa?	Mumati chiyani.....mu Chichewa?

## LESSON 7: Questioning Words

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
Yes and no	Inde (yes) iyayi/ayi( no)
Who?	Ndani?
Where?	Kuti?
What?	Chiyani?
How many?	Angati?
What time?	Nthawi yanji?
When?	Liti?
How much?	Ndalama zingati?
Why?	Chifukwa chiyani?
How?	Bwanji
Because	Chifukwa?

The verb “*to have*” in Chichewa is formed by *Kuli* (verb to be) + *ndi* preposition with which literally translates (to be with)

*Example:*

Ndili ndi njala = I am hungry (Literally meaning “*I am with hunger*”)

## LESSON 8: Commands and Requests

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
Please eat	Idyani
Please sit	Khalani
! Come here!	Bwerani kuno
Please wait	Dikirani!
Let's go/come on!	Tiyeni!
False / untrue	Bodza
True	Zowona
That's enough!	Basi!
Do you understand?	Mukumvetsa?
I need_(coke)_ please.	Ndikufuna coke chonde
Ndipatseni madzi chonde. Give me_(water)_ please.	Give me _(water)_ please.
Go well	Pitani bwino
Stay well	Tsalani bwino

In Chichewa polite commands are formed by dropping the infinitive *-ku* and add the suffix *+ni*. For monosyllabic words which are very few in number you drop the infinitive *-ku* and add “*+i*” as a prefix.

*Example: kudya (to eat) becomes Idyani as a command for eat whereby please is implied.*

## LESSON 9: Numbers

NUMBERS	ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
1	One	-Modzi
2	Two	-Wiri
3	Three	-tatu
4	Four	-nayi
5	Five	-sanu
6	- Six	Sanu ndi modzi
7	Seven	-sanu ndi wiri
8	- Eight	Sanu ndi tatu
9	Nine	-sanu ndi nayi
10	Ten	Khumi

In Chichewa, nouns are grouped. Hence, numbers always have to agree with the preceding noun class.

### Example

Ana awiri = two children

Nyumba ziwiri = two houses

## LESSON 10: Food

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
Food	Chakudya
Rice	Mpunga
Side-dishes	Ndiwo
Meat	Nyama
Pork	Nyama ya nkhumba
Beef	Nyama ya ng`ombe
Chicken	Nkhuku
Fish	Nsomba
Eggs	Mazira
Greens	Masamba
Beans	Nyemba
Peanut butter	Chiponde

Peanut	Mtedza
Oil	Mafuta
Salt	Mchere
Pepper	Tsabola
Irish potatoes	Mbatatesi
Sweet Potatoes	mbatata
Tomato	Matimati
Pumpkin leaves	Masamba a nkhwani
Pigeon peas	Nsawawa
Fruits	Zipatso
Paw paw	Papaya
Pineapple	Chinananzi
Mango	Mango
Cassava	Chinangwa
Corn	Chimanga
Cucumber	Nkhaka
Drinks	Zakumwa
Water	Madzi
Rice-water	Madzi a Mpunga
Tea	Tiyi
Beer	Mowa
Milk	Mkaka

## LESSON 11: Days of the Week and Parts of the Day

### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Monday	Lolemba
Tuesday	Lachiwiri
Wednesday	Lachitatu
Thursday	Lachinayi
Friday	Lachisanu
Saturday	Loweluka
Sunday	Lamulungu
Yesterday	Dzulo
Today	Lero
Tomorrow	Mawa

### PARTS OF THE DAY

Morning	M`mawa
Noon	Masana
Evening	Usiku

## LESSON 12: Feelings

### VOCABULARY

That makes me happy.	Chimandisangalatsa
That's sad.	Zomvetsa chisoni
That's surprising.	Zodabwitsa
That's shocking!	Zochititsa mantha
It's tiring.	Zotopetsa
That's annoying	Zokwiyitsa
That's doubtful.	Zokayikitsa

### SENTENCES

He/She is happy.	Ndiwosangalala.
You are surprised.	Muli wodabwa.
I am sad.	Sindili wosangalala.
They are afraid.	Ali ndi mantha.
He/she is lazy.	Ndiwaulesi.
I hate it.	Ndimadana nazo
I trust you.	Ndimakukhulupilira



## LESSON 13: House Items

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
Chair	Mpando
Table	Tebulo
Bed frame	Kama
Blankets	Zofunda
Door	Chitseko
Window	Zenera
Mosquito net	Chotetezera udzudzu
Matt	Mphasa
Broom	Tsache

## DIALOGUE 1

ENGLISH	CHICHEWA
<b>A:</b> Hallo Mother!	Moni Mayi!
<b>B:</b> Hallo Father	Moni Bambo!
<b>A:</b> Good morning?	Mwadzuka bwanji?
<b>B:</b> I woke up well, what about you?	Ndadzuka bwino kaya inu
<b>A:</b> I woke up well too, thank you.	Ndadzuka bwinonso zikomo
<b>B:</b> Thank you	Zikomo
<b>B:</b> My name is Bindili and you?	Dzina langa ndi Susan
<b>A:</b> Thank you see you later	Zikomo tiwonana

## DIALOGUE 2

**Joyce:** M`banja mwanu mulipo angati?  
(How many are you in your family?)

**Alice:** M`banja mwathu tilipo anayi  
(There are four of us in our family)

**Joyce:** Kodi woyamba kubadwa ndani?  
(Who is the first born?)

**Alice:** Ine ndine woyamba kubadwa  
(I am the first born)

**Joyce:** Nanga wachiwiri ndani?  
(Who is the second born?)

**Alice:** Wachiwiri ndi mchemwali wanga.  
(The second born is my sister)

## DIALOGUE 3 Chichewa only

**Cedric:** Moni Mayi

**Susan:** Moni Bambo

**Cedric:** Muli bwanji?

**Susan:** Ndili bwino, kaya inu?

**Cedric:** Ndili bwinonso Zikomo

**Susan:** Zikomo

**Cedric:** Kodi dzina lanu ndani?

**Susan:** Ine dzina langa ndi Susan nanga inu?

**Cedric:** Aah! Ine dzina langa ndi Cedric

**Cedric:** Mumachokera kuti Susan?

**Susan:** Ndimachokera kuno ku Malawi ku Nkhata-bay, nanga inu?

**Cedric:** Ndimachokera ku Malawinso ku Blantyre

**Susan:** ooh! Zikomo

**Cedric:** Tiwonana a Susan

**Susan:** Tiwonana a Cedric.