

Lesin 9  
(not tone-marked)

## Uses of “ka” – a continuation

(for intermediate and advanced students)

by

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Like “na” or “ga”, the two-letter word “ka” has several functions in the Igbo grammar. This structural word is so important that in most cases the speech intention cannot be realised without it. Some of the uses of “ka” are explained below with examples.

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- 1) We use “ka” to start a sentence which expresses a wish. When used in this way, “ka” is placed at the beginning of the sentence and can be translated into English as “may”.

### Examples:

- a) Ka Chukwu gozie gi. – May God bless you.
- b) Ka ụbọchị gi dị anya. – May your days be long.
- c) Ka Chukwu nye unu ahụ ike. – May God grant you good health.
- d) Ka amara nke Chukwu nọnyere unu niile. – May the glory of God be with you all.
- e) Ka ala eze gi bịa – Thy kingdom come (Our Lord’s prayer)
- f) Ka chi foo (Ka chi bọọ) – Good night, May you see a new day.

**Note** that some wishes – especially in prayers - can be expressed using the imperative. “Ka” is not used in these cases.

### Examples:

- a) Nna anyị bi n’elu igwe, **gozie** ndị nkuzi anyị niile. – Our Lord in heaven, bless all our teachers.
  - b) Chukwu **nọnyere** ndị niile ahụ adighị mma. – God, be with all the sick people.
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- 2) “Ka” is also used to start sentences showing that we are about to take leave of people:

### Examples:

- a) Ka e mesịa. – See you later.
  - b) Ka ọ dịwa echi (Ka ọ dịba echi). – See you tomorrow.
  - c) Ka ọ dịwa (dịba) ụbọchị ụka. – See you on Sunday.
  - d) Ka ọ dịwa (dịba) oge ọzọ. – See you some other time.
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- 3) Another useful function of “**ka**” is seen in questions. In fact, there are some types of questions which cannot be asked unless “**ka**” is used. Here it functions as a defining relative pronoun.

**Examples:**

- a) Gịnị ka i bu n’obi? – What’s on your mind? (What is it that you have in mind?)
  - b) Gịnị ka ị na-eme? – What are you doing? (What is it that you are doing?)
  - c) Ọ bụ onye ka ọ na-eche? – Who is he/she waiting for?
  - d) Kedu ka i si bịa ebe a? – How did you get here?
  - e) Gịnị ka ị na-eche? (cf. Gịnị na-eche gị?) – What are you thinking about? (What is bothering you?)
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- 4) We use “**ka**” to start sentences when arranging appointments, making suggestions, encouraging someone to do something or expressing resignation (as in example “d” below). Here “**ka**” can be translated as “Let’s (Let us) ...” or “Shall we ...”.

**Examples:**

- a) Ka anyị hụ echi. – Let’s see tomorrow.
  - b) Ka anyị gbaa bọlụ. (Ka anyị sọọ mpi). – Let’s play football.
  - c) Ka anyị gwuo mmiri. – Shall we go swimming? Let’s go swimming.
  - d) Ka anyị nwere ihe niile tinye Chukwu n’aka. – Let’s commit everything to God.
  - e) Ka anyị chefuo nsogbu anyị niile. – Let’s forget all our worries.
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- 5) “**Ka**” can be used to compare two things or persons of equal beauty, size, excellence, degree, performance etc. In this case, it has the function of a conjunction and can be translated using “as ... as” or “like”.

**Examples:**

- a) Nkechi mara mma ka nne ya. – Nkechi is as beautiful as her mother.
  - b) Nwoke ahụ na-eme ka onye isi adighị mma. – That man behaves like a mad man.
  - c) Ọ na-arị elu ka enwe. – He climbs like a monkey.
  - d) Ọ na-agbasi ọsọ ike ka nwanne ya nwoke. He runs as fast as his brother.
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- 6) For the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs, the suffix “**rịa**” resp. “**rịcha**” is added to the word “**ka**”. These derivatives of “**ka**” function as conjunctions for comparison.

**Examples:**

- a) O toro ogologo karịa\* Josef (O tokarịrị Josef n’ogologo) – He/She is taller than Joseph.
- b) Ọ mara mma karịa nne ya. She is more beautiful (or prettier) than her mother.
- c) Maazị Okeke nwere ego karịcha ndị ezi na ụlọ ya niile. – Mr Okeke is the richest man in his family.

\* In some Igbo dialects, the variation “**kara**” is also possible for “**karia**”. **Example:** O toro ogologo kara Josef.

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- 7) Note that **aka** can be a variant of **ka** (the prefix **a + ka**): it is used to express something that was left undone in the past due to the implied circumstances. Here **aka** is translated as “**could have**”, “**would have**” or “**should have/ought to have**” in English. Most sentences containing **aka** therefore correspond to the third conditionals in English. Note the modifications in the verbs that follow “ka”. For negative sentences in this category, just add the suffix **-ghi** to **aka**. Please use the unmodified infinitive in this case (see sentence c below).

**Examples: (Check out the translations of sentences a – d at the end of this lesson!)**

- a) Anyị aka abịa hụ unu ma ọ bụrụ na anyị nwere oge (ohere).
  - b) Ego aka eduga gị ozi ma ọ bụrụ na ị gwara ya.
  - c) Tochukwu akaghi **ida** ule ya ma ọ bụrụ na ọ gụsiri akwụkwọ ike. (ida ule – to fail exam(s))
  - d) Unu aka enyere Uchenna aka. (inye aka – to render help to, to help, to give someone a hand)
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- 8) When “**ka**” is used as a verb (the stem of the verb **ika**), it may have different meanings depending on its complement:

- a) *iká mmadụ ama akwụkwọ* (to be more intelligent than someone)
- b) *iká nká* (to be old)
- c) *iká àká* (to be matured as with fruits)
- d) *iká anya* (to be impudent, impertinent, cheeky or saucy)
- e) *ikà akara* (to draw a line).
- f) *ikà ụka* (to celebrate a Mass)

**Examples:**

- a) Ada ka Ego mara akwụkwọ. Ada is more intelligent than Ego.
  - b) Ọ kārā nká tupu o (wee) nwụọ. – He was advanced in age before he died.
  - c) Mangoro (Mango) ndị a akabeghi aka. These mangoes are not yet matured.
  - d) Nwata nke a kara anya ebe ọ dị ukwúú. – This is a very impertinent child.
  - e) O weere nzu ọcha kaa akara n’ala. – He drew a line on the ground with a chalk.
  - f) Ha na-aka ụka ụbọchị ụka niile. - They celebrate Mass every Sunday.
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- 9) **Ka** can also be suffixed to the verb it is qualifying. It is translated as “very”, which is an adverb qualifying the adjective after it.

**Examples:**

- a) Ọ maka mma. – She is very pretty/beautiful.
  - b) O buka ibu. - He/She is very fat.
  - c) Ha erika nne. - They are many (numerous).
  - d) Ọ taka ahụ. - He/She is very skinny (has emaciated a lot).
  - e) O sika ike. It is very difficult. Or: He/she is very strong.
  - f) Ọ raka ahụ. – It is very difficult. Ọ rara ahụ. Ọ rara ahụ nke ukwuu.
  - g) Ọ tọka ụkọ. – It is very sweet. Or It is very delicious.
  - h) O toka ogologo. Ha etoka ogologo. – He/She is very tall. They are very tall.
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10) Like in function 9 above, **ka** can be used as a suffix, but with a pejorative meaning. And like in 9 above, it functions as an adverb. Note that “**na**” is hyphenated to the verb.

**Examples:**

- a) Ọ na-ekwuka. – He/She talks a lot. He/She is a talkative.
  - b) Ọ na-asịka. - He/She gossips a lot. He/She is a gossip.
  - c) Ọn ana-ekwutọka mmadu. - John likes backbiting other people. John is a backbiter.
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11) **Ka** can also be used to introduce a reported speech, especially the imperative forms, which can be translated into English using infinitive constructions.

**Examples:**

- a) “Biko nyere m aka.” – Ọ rịọrọ m (yọrọ m) ka m nyere ya aka. (indirect/reported speech)
- b) Nne Ada: “Putà n’anwụ.” Nne Ada gwara ya ka ọ pụta n’anwụ. (reported speech)

**Translations of number 11:**

- a) “Please help me.” – He/She wanted me/asked me to help him/her.
  - b) Ada’s mother: “Don’t stay in the sun.” – Ada’s mother asked/warned her not to stay in the sun.
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**Number 7 above: Translations of sentences a – d:**

- a) We would have come to see you (visited you) if we had had time.
  - b) Ego would have accompanied you on an errand if you had told her.
  - c) Tochukwu could have passed his exams if he had studied hard.
  - d) You (people) should have/ought to have helped Uchenna.
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**Now do the following tasks:**

**Task 1:** Make two sentences to indicate each of the above uses of “ka”. (22 sentences on the whole)

**Task 2:** How many of the infinitives of the verbs you have used and their object complements can you write down? Can you translate them (the infinitives and their complements) into English?

**Example:**

**Task 1:** sentence one: Adaeze ebuka ibu. – Adaeze is very fat.

**Task 2:** *ibu ibu* (to be fat, to be big/huge): The first *ibu* is the *to infinitive* while the second *ibu* is its *object complement*.

**Remarks:** Answers to the above tasks can be sent to me for corrections and/or comments. If there are any questions with regard to the topic treated here, feel free to contact me at:

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*Please allow enough time for my replies/corrections!*