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LANGUAGE FAMILIES: OVERVIEW

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See also **Agriculture; Colonial Policies and Practice; Concessionary Companies; Development; Ecology; Food; Forestry; Kinship and Descent; Law; Peasants, Peasantries, and Land Settlement; Production Systems.**

LANGUAGE FAMILIES

[In writing about language classifications, linguists employ conventions of terminology that may be unfamiliar to the nonspecialist. One such convention is the use of a genealogical model to describe the relationship obtaining among several languages sharing internal features of syntax, phonology, and vocabulary. Thus, when languages appear to be related to or derived from one another, these relationships are often presented in tree diagrams, similar to those used in genealogy. This model implies the existence, at some earlier time, of a single "parent" language, which no longer exists but can be postulated and hypothetically described through the application of known principles of language change. Such hypothesized languages are referred to as "proto" languages. Thus, the term "proto-Bantu" refers not to an existing language but the theoretically postulated original languages from which all modern Bantu languages originated. Since the actual features of proto languages cannot be known with certainty, linguists usually precede hypothesized reconstructions with an asterisk (*). Finally, when linguists consider syntactic structure in the course of classifying languages, one of the important features is the order in which parts of speech occur. Specifically, languages differ in the sequence in which the parts of speech appear in a sentence. English sentence syntax is, generally, organized as an "SVO" language (the subject occurs first, followed by the verb, which is followed by the object.) Other languages may follow somewhat different patterns, such as SOV.

After an **Overview** article, coverage of language families continues with entries on **Afroasiatic Languages, Bantu Languages, Creole and Pidgen Languages, Khoisan and Click Languages, Niger-Congo Languages, and Nilo-Saharan Languages.**

OVERVIEW

There are approximately fifteen hundred distinct traditional indigenous sub-Saharan African languages. This number does not include: (1) the major European languages widely spoken on the continent as a result of the colonial experience

Alenanyo

12501-503

Ibrisim
12503-503

Muhnech
12505-506

Mufene
12506-508

Trail
12508-509

Williamson
12509-512

Cyffan
12512-515

(English, French, Portuguese); (2) Afrikaans, the variety of Dutch developed and employed in South Africa primarily by settlers from Holland and immigrants from the Malay Archipelago; (3) Krio, an English-based creole spoken in Sierra Leone, and Malagasy, a Malayo-Polynesian (Austronesian) language spoken on the island of Madagascar; and (4) Arabic, which is spoken across North Africa as well as by smaller groups in the Sahelian regions of Nigeria, Niger, and Chad.

Most African countries are linguistically complex and heterogeneous. Essentially monolingual countries, such as Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi, are the exception. The many languages that exist in Africa vary tremendously in size and importance. At one extreme are multinational languages with extensive literatures, such as Swahili and Hausa, which have over twenty-five million speakers. At the other extreme are the small, isolated languages, perhaps spoken in one or two villages by under one thousand speakers. Large languages with upward of two million speakers include Akan (Ghana), Amharic (Ethiopia), Bambara or Mandekan (Mali), Chichewa (Malawi), Ewe (Ghana, Togo), Fulani (west Africa), Ganda (Uganda), Gbaya (the Central African Republic), Hausa (Nigeria, Niger); Igbo (Ibo) (Nigeria), Kanuri (Nigeria), Gikuyu (Kenya), Kinyarwanda/Kirundi (Rwanda, Burundi), Kongo (Zaire), Lingala (Zaire, the Congo), Luo (Kenya), Mbundu (Angola), Mooré/Mossi (Burkina Faso), Nguni (including Xhosa, Zulu, and Swati) (South Africa, Swaziland), Oromo (Ethiopia), Sango (the Central African Republic), Shona (Zimbabwe), Somali (Somalia), Sotho (including Tswana) (South Africa, Botswana), Swahili (east Africa), Tigrinya (Ethiopia), Wolof (Senegal, Gambia), and Yoruba (Nigeria).

A most striking and significant sociolinguistic event affecting the continent is the phenomenal growth in the second half of the twentieth century of the larger national and regional languages. These languages are rapidly expanding in numbers of speakers and in functions. They are sometimes being given official or semiofficial governmental status (e.g., Swahili in Tanzania) or designated for use in primary education (e.g., Yoruba in Nigeria) or in radio and television broadcasts. The smaller languages, by contrast, are being increasingly neglected and deserted by their speakers, who see use of a major language as a means of joining the modern world. The result is an ongoing process of language death, some of the languages disappear-

ing before they have ever been documented for posterity.

Descriptions of individual African languages go back to the sixteenth century, coinciding with the beginning of the European age of exploration. Systematic comparison and classification, on the other hand, did not begin until the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1863, Karl Richard Lepsius, a major Egyptologist of the time, set up a three-way classification: Semitic (comprised of Arabic and Hebrew, among others), Hamitic (which included all African languages that had grammatical gender but were not Semitic), and African (everything else). This tripartite structure, which was as much racial as linguistic, was replicated in one guise or another over the next hundred years. Later in the nineteenth century, the general linguist Friedrich Müller offered a more diverse and detailed classification containing six groups: Semitic, Hamitic, Nuba-Fula, Hottentot-Bushman, Bantu (whose status as a close-knit family had been widely accepted since the early work of the German philologist W. H. I. Bleek), and Negro. This classification was popularized and became well-known through an 1883 book by Robert Cust, *A Sketch of the Modern Languages of Africa*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a revised classification was presented by the great German Africanist Carl Meinhof (1915). According to Meinhof, the languages of the continent fell into five families: Semitic, Hamitic (which in this formulation was a much broader classification and had an even more extreme racial basis than earlier delineations), Sudanic, Bantu, and Bushman. This classification was widely adopted by linguists, historians, and anthropologists and became the standardly accepted system, not only for scholars but as a basis for African language cataloging by university libraries around the world.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, the American linguist Joseph H. Greenberg offered a new and different classification of African languages. This work achieved its definitive form, by which it is now known and generally accepted, in his book *The Languages of Africa* (1963). In Greenberg's scheme, the aim of which was to describe purely historical linguistic relationships among languages, divorced from typological or racial considerations, all African languages were assigned to four major phyla, or super-families: Afroasiatic (= Hamito-Semitic), Niger-Congo (= Niger-Kordofanian), Nilo-Saharan, and Khoisan. This classification differed from Meinhof's in many respects. First, the

Hamitic family, which had been part of African language classification since its inception, was dismantled. Some of the so-called Hamitic languages, such as Somali (and related Cushitic languages of the Horn of Africa) and Hausa (and related Chadic languages of Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad), were incorporated as distinct branches in the new Afroasiatic phylum. Others, such as Fulani, Maasai, and Nama (Khoi), were assigned to lower-level groups within Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Khoisan, respectively. Second, Bantu was eliminated as a major family and reclassified as a subgroup within the Niger-Congo family. Third, the disparate Sudanic family was broken up, some of the languages (mostly in west Africa) being assigned to Niger-Congo, others (mostly in central and east Africa, but including Songhai, spoken in Mali) to Nilo-Saharan. Finally, the "Bushman" and "Hottentot" languages, along with two isolated languages in east Africa (Hadza and Sandawe), were combined into a single Khoisan family.

In the 1950s and 1960s the only real counter to Greenberg's classification was an approach championed by scholars at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). This was exemplified by Malcom Guthrie's magnum opus on Bantu, and by the books and monographs prepared by A. N. Tucker and M. A. Bryan, among others, which were published as the *Handbook of African Languages* series. The essence of the SOAS approach was to focus on classification as a basis for a consistent and practical referential system. Thus, long-range and seemingly speculative classifications were eschewed in favor of linguistic groupings that were as clear and obvious to linguists as Germanic or Romance. In the final analysis, scholars came to realize that this referential approach was not an alternative to Greenberg's classification but rather constituted a distinct endeavor with distinct aims and objectives. As a comprehensive linguistic classification, Greenberg's model has stood the test of time and, subsequent modifications and improvements notwithstanding, remains the essential, authoritative work in the field.

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See also *Language Use; Linguistics and the Study of Africa; Literature*.

AFROASIATIC LANGUAGES

The Afroasiatic (Afro-Asiatic, Afrasian, Hamitosemitic, Hamito-Semitic, Semito-Hamitic) languages comprise some 230 modern and a dozen dead languages. The speakers of the living ones may be estimated at approximately 250 million, spread across northern, central, and eastern Africa as well as western Asia. The Afroasiatic languages are genetically related and form a linguistic phylum that consists of five or six branches, each having the status of a linguistic family: Ancient Egyptian, Berber, Semitic, Chadic, Cushitic, and possibly Omotic. The first branch is represented only by dead languages; Berber and Semitic, by both dead and living; and the latter three, only by living languages. The number of speakers of the individual languages within these branches ranges between a few hundred and millions.

The term "Afroasiatic" was introduced by Joseph Greenberg in the 1950s to replace the connotation of a linguistic opposition between Semitic and the remaining languages of the phylum suggested by "Semito-Hamitic" and similar terms. The Ancient Egyptian branch is represented by the language of pharaonic Egypt from the third millennium B.C.E. and its subsequent stages of development, including Coptic, which was spoken until the sixteenth century C.E.

The numerous Berber languages and dialects are spoken mostly in North Africa between Morocco and Egypt as well as in the Sahara and Sahel (southwestern Mauritania [Zenaga], Niger, and

Mali [Tuareg]). The name Berber comes via Arabic from the Greek *bárbaros*, originally meaning a person speaking a language other than Greek. This branch is also known as Berber-Libyan due to the inclusion of the Old Libyan (Numidian) language (attested by inscriptions only). Some scholars classify the extinct Guanche languages of the Canary Islands in this branch, labeling it Libyan-Guanche.

The Semitic branch, named after Shem, a son of Noah (Genesis 9:18), includes dead languages—Akkadian (with Babylonian and Assyrian dialects), Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic, Hebrew, Ge'ez—as well as living ones: Arabic, Modern Hebrew (Israel), Neo-Aramaic (Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey), Modern South Arabian (southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra Island), and the Ethio-Semitic languages—Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigre—spoken mainly in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Among the latter, Amharic is a first or second language for about nineteen million people. Of all the Afroasiatic languages, Modern Standard Arabic and its dialects in the whole of North Africa, Western Sahara, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Southwest Asia are the most widespread, with probably more than 160 million speakers.

With its 150 languages the Chadic family, named after Lake Chad, is the most numerous Afroasiatic language. The Chadic-speaking peoples are spread throughout northern Nigeria, Chad, and northern Cameroon. Hausa is used widely as a means of interethnic communication in western Africa; for more than forty million speakers in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Togo, Bénin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and the Sudan it is a first or second language.

The Cushitic languages, named after Cush, a grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:6–8), are spoken in Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan, Kenya, and Tanzania. Oromo (mainly in Ethiopia) and Somali (mainly in Somalia) are spoken by 10 million and 5.6 million people, respectively. In the 1970s a group of languages spoken in southwestern Ethiopia, and previously classified as West Cushitic, was separated by some scholars to form a new Omotic branch (named after the Omo River).

Comparative study of Afroasiatic languages faces the problem of differing knowledge of the time depth of the individual languages: on the one hand, almost five thousand years of Ancient Egyptian written language history; on the other hand, newly discovered languages from the Chadic, Cushitic, and Omotic branches whose description is still in progress. In this context it must be mentioned that with the formation of nation-

states and the development of modern means of communication, minority languages have been given up or are in the process of extinction. Comparative and reconstruction research within each Afroasiatic branch is needed, and is being carried out. More attention is being paid to the specific geolinguistic situation, mainly in the Sahara and Sahel, which has resulted in a multiplicity of contacts among the languages in question as well as with other nonrelated linguistic groups. Thus, for instance, Cushitic languages are spoken in areas where Ethio-Semitic-, Nilotic-, or Bantu-speaking peoples also live; many Chadic languages have been in long-standing contact with speakers of Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo languages. In addition, with the spread of Islam, Arabic has affected the languages of the whole region. Also indisputable is the impact of lingua francas in all multi-ethnic societies. The question of keeping linguistic substrata, adstrata, and superstrata apart is a must for understanding the history of Afroasiatic languages.

Among the common linguistic features shared by all branches are a consonantal phonological tri-
chotomy: voiceless:voiced:glottalized/emphatic; a feminine *t* marker in the nominal and verbal systems; a perfective:imperfective verbal dichotomy (the latter marked by an *a(a)* infix and/or by reduplication of the second or third root consonant); an internal plural formation (broken plurals) with an *a(a)* infix. The attempts to reconstruct proto-Afroasiatic have led to the conclusion that its speakers might have been settled in the southeastern Sahara and eastern Africa in the tenth or ninth millennium B.C.E.

The writing systems of the Afroasiatic languages belong to the earliest scripts in the world: the hieroglyphic of Ancient Egyptian (forth–third millennium B.C.E.); the cuneiform system of Akkadian (mid-third millennium B.C.E.); the cuneiform quasi-alphabetic script of Ugaritic (mid-third millennium B.C.E.); and the Phoenician alphabet (mid-second millennium B.C.E.), from which emerged (consequently or independently) the Aramaic, Hebrew, Arabic, Amharic, Tuareg (called Tifinagh), Greek, and Latin scripts. The modern Afroasiatic languages without a tradition of writing use mainly the Latin script.

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See also **Linguistics and the Study of Africa; Writing Systems.**

BANTU LANGUAGES

The Bantu languages comprise a large group of languages that are widely spoken in sub-Saharan Africa, in an area south of an imaginary line stretching from Cameroon in the northwest to Kenya in the east and including all of southern Africa. The countries in which they are predominantly spoken are Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, the Comoro Islands, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In some of these, non-Bantu languages are also spoken; for example, in Kenya there are speakers of languages of the Nilo-Saharan and Afro-Asiatic families, and in southern Africa adjacent to Bantu-speaking populations, Khoisan-speaking communities can be found. Small numbers of Bantu-speakers can also be found in some countries contiguous to the Bantu domain, such as the Central African Republic and along the southern coast of Somalia. Bantu languages are also spoken along the northwest coast of Madagascar, where Malagasy, a Malayo-Indonesian language, is predominant. Where Bantu languages are in contact with non-Bantu languages there is often evidence of mutual influence; for example, Southern Bantu languages have borrowed the click sounds of Khoisan languages. Well-known examples of Bantu languages are Swahili, spoken in eastern Africa; Lingala, in Zaire; and Zulu, in southern Africa. Although an exact number is impossible to cite, there are easily 200 million speakers of Bantu languages. Some languages have many millions of speakers, for exam-

ple, Swahili (40–50 million, throughout eastern Africa), Gikuyu (4.35 million, Kenya), Lingala (8.4 million, Zaire), Kongo (4.7 million, Zaire and Angola), Luba-Kasai (6.3 million, Zaire), Makua (5.2 million, Mozambique), Rwanda/Rundi (14 million, throughout central Africa), and Zulu/Xhosa (15 million, South Africa). The total number of Bantu languages is also difficult to assess. Estimates range from well over three hundred to somewhat less than seven hundred. This imprecision hinges on the difficulty in deciding whether related tongues are dialectal variants of the same language or are separate languages. Also, linguists and others have not always agreed on the criteria for defining a Bantu language.

Linguistic Affiliation

Because of the large number of speakers of Bantu languages, the extent of the area in which these languages are spoken, the important sociocultural role they play in numerous countries, and because they were some of the first African languages studied and recorded by Europeans, they are often considered a unique family of languages. However, they are part of a subgroup of an even larger configuration of languages; the Niger-Congo (or Niger-Kordofanian) family, which represents two-thirds of Africa's approximately nineteen hundred languages. Other subgroups of Niger-Congo languages are spoken from Cameroon west to Senegal, and include many of the languages of Nigeria, Ghana, and other western African countries south of the Sahara. In addition to Niger-Congo, three other African language families are recognized by linguists: Afro-Asiatic, Khoisan, and Nilo-Saharan.

The degree of relationship between the Bantu languages is comparable to that existing between other closely related subgroups of languages, such as Romance, Germanic, and Slavic. Speakers of one Bantu language will readily recognize words and similar grammatical structures of another Bantu language spoken just a few miles away in another district or many hundreds of miles away in another country. The Bantu languages themselves can be divided into many sub-subgroups. There are distinctions between "wide" and "narrow" Bantu, where the latter can be defined by a well-recognized common stock of vocabulary and obviously consistent grammatical structures, while the former sometimes look more like neighboring non-Bantu languages and less like "typical" Bantu languages. Most linguists recognize that Eastern and Southern Bantu languages are closely related and

similar to one another, while those spoken in the northwest are quite diverse and dissimilar but demonstrably members of the Bantu group.

Language Variation

There are just a few countries in which a single Bantu language is spoken by a significant portion of the population. Examples are Burundi, Rwanda, Swaziland, and Botswana. Otherwise, fragmentation is so significant that in some countries there can be many dozens of languages and dialects spoken. Gabon, for example, with a population of just over a million, has forty recognized Bantu ethnolinguistic groups, while Tanzania (population 26 million) has about a hundred. Thus, language planners, educators, politicians, and others interested in the role language plays as a cohesive sociocultural force are faced with a daunting task. Solutions have varied. In education, courts, media, and other official and semiofficial functions, most countries rely on the former colonial language. East African countries are almost unique in utilizing Swahili in these roles. Other countries, where the majority of the people are native speakers of a single Bantu language, have an advantage (e.g., Burundi, Rwanda, Botswana, and Swaziland). But even here the relationship between the former colonial language and the indigenous Bantu language is complex: Bantu languages tend to function in intimate personal situations among family and clan members, in local primary and sometimes secondary schools, and in market environments, while the European language plays a role in the courts, higher education, the media, and government offices. Besides Swahili, other Bantu languages, such as Lingala and Kituba (both spoken in Zaire), and Fangolo (a Zulu-based pidgin spoken by mine workers and others in southern Africa), are regional languages and serve as crosslingual vehicles of communication.

Orthography, Literacy, and Literature

Today, many Bantu languages are written languages and use variations of a Roman-based orthography, but Bantu-language literacy exists only where the languages play important roles in education and in the media. An obvious example is Swahili. Elsewhere, where Bible literacy is common and there is literacy transferral from the former colonial language, people can read and write their own languages even though official orthographies do not exist. Swahili is perhaps unique in having been written originally in an Arabic script in precolonial Africa. Few Bantu languages have a written

literature, though there are notable exceptions: Swahili in eastern Africa and Zulu (Xhosa) in southern Africa.

Linguistic Sketch

Most narrow Bantu languages have a widely distributed common stock of vocabulary which historically derived from a common reconstructed parent language called proto-Bantu; most scholars agree that this parent language was spoken about two to three thousand or more years ago in northwestern Africa, in present-day southeastern Nigeria and Cameroon. Also derived from this parent language is a system of noun classification in which nouns are divided into a dozen or more grammatical classes characterized by singular and plural prefixes; in individual Bantu languages such prefixes can often be identified with semantic characteristics denoting class or kind, kinship, certain descriptive qualities, abstractions, and so on. Nouns in turn, through affix-marking, govern grammatical agreement with other sentential constituents such as adjectives and verbs. Verbs carry the burden of affixes that mark subject or object, tense or aspect, relativeness, negation, and other grammatical categories. Word order is usually SVO (subject-verb-object) and modifiers follow the head. For the most part, with few exceptions (e.g., Swahili), Bantu languages are tonal languages with inherent high and low tones associated with all words in the language.

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See also **Language Use; Linguistics and the Study of Africa; Literature.**

CREOLE AND PIDGIN LANGUAGES

Creoles and pidgins are language varieties that developed during the seventeenth through the early twentieth centuries out of contacts of

colonial nonstandard European dialects with non-European languages on the islands and coasts of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Examples include Saramaccan and Sranan (Suriname), Papiamentu (the Netherlands Antilles), Gullah (United States), Jamaican, Haitian, Guadeloupean, and, in Africa, Cape Verdian, Kriyol (Guinea-Bissau and Senegal), Krio (Sierra Leone), Nigerian Pidgin, Cameroonian Pidgin, Mauritian, and Seychellois. The terms have also been extended to varieties which developed during the same period out of contacts of primarily non-European languages; examples of these include Kikongo-Kituba and Lingala (Zaire and the Republic of the Congo), Kinubi (southern Sudan and western Uganda), Sango (Central African Republic), and Fanagalo (South Africa). The inclusion of lingua francas such as Swahili, Hausa, Songhai, and the like in this category is controversial. Aside from the fact that there are no structural features that define pidgins and creoles, these lingua francas do not share many structural features associated with these languages. They have not diverged as much from their lexifiers (the original varieties from which they started) as have pidgins and creoles. The latter are grouped together essentially by similarities in the sociohistorical conditions of their development and by their ethnographic functions.

Since the early twentieth century, pidgins have been distinguished from creoles in that they are said to have no native speakers, have limited communicative functions—restricted typically to trade—and have less complex structures than creoles. However, Nigerian Pidgin and Cameroonian Pidgin show as much structural complexity and communicative breadth as Krio, a creole, and they also have significant proportions of native speakers. It has also been claimed that creoles are former pidgins which were vernacularized by children, but historical facts dispute this view.

The term “creole” was originally coined in the Iberian colonies, apparently in the sixteenth century, for descendants of Iberians and Africans born in American colonies. Having been borrowed by other European languages by the early seventeenth century, it was extended later to descendants of Africans and Europeans born in other colonies. The term was apparently not applied to language in English until 1825. It seems to have been used earlier in French, in the eighteenth century. This usage may have been initiated by metropolitan Europeans to disfranchise particular colonial varieties of their languages.

The term “pidgin” was first introduced in English in 1807, in reference to the English adopted as “business” language, for trade, in Canton. Nothing in the history of this Chinese pidgin English suggests that it developed into a creole. The social histories of the western Atlantic and Indian Oceans suggest that their creoles developed from varieties closer to those spoken by European colonists and diverged only gradually into their *basilects* (the varieties most different from their lexifiers), probably during the eighteenth century, when infant mortality was high on the plantations, life expectancy short, the labor-force populations increased more by importation than by birth, and the proportion of fluent or native speakers of the earlier colonial varieties kept decreasing.

One of the most central questions in studying creoles regards the mechanics of their development. The most current hypotheses today invoke the substrate, superstrate, and language bioprogram, as explained below.

According to substratists, creoles in the strict sense owe most, or several, of their structural features to the languages previously spoken by the Africans enslaved in the New World and the Indian Ocean. Originally, substratists reacted in part to dialectologists (the superstrate hypothesis), according to whom the primary, if not the exclusive, sources of creoles’ structures are the nonstandard varieties of their lexifiers to which the Africans were exposed. They have also been challenged by the language bioprogram hypothesis, which argues that creoles were invented by children from the grammarless pidgins spoken by their parents and according to default principles provided by universal grammar.

Few creolists interested in creole genesis still subscribe to one exclusive explanation. The complementary hypothesis seems to be an adequate alternative, provided we can articulate the linguistic and nonlinguistic conditions under which the competing influences (between the substrate and superstrate languages, and within each group) may have converged or prevailed upon each other.

Still, the future of research on creole genesis has some problems to overcome. So far, information on the nonstandard varieties of the lexifiers spoken by the European colonists remains limited. There are still few comprehensive descriptions of creoles’ systems, which makes it difficult to determine globally how the competing influences interacted among them and to assess whether the uniform cross-creole restructuring plan suggested by some

hypotheses is justified. Very few structural facts have been correlated with the conclusions suggested by the sociohistorical backgrounds of individual creoles.

African pidgins and creoles (Kikongo-Kituba, Lingala, Fanagalo, Sango, Kinubi, etc.) are very much associated with the colonization of the continent, although they have been developed by the Africans themselves. The colonial agents provided the contact settings, the colonial posts and factories, to which people of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds migrated, and where they needed a common language to communicate with each other. Typically, they developed these pidgins and creoles from an ethnic language that had served as a lingua franca in interethnic trade before European colonization (Ki-tuba from Kikongo, Lingala from Bobangi, Sango from Ngbandi) or from an important language spoken around the colonial post or factory (Fanagalo from Zulu). Kinubi is the only one based on Arabic and is associated with Arabicized blacks in Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda who descend from the nineteenth-century Turco-Egyptian army in today's southern Sudan. The pidgins and creoles developed through changes that the lexifiers underwent while being appropriated by the non-native speakers.

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SALIKOKO S. MUFWENE

See also **Language Use**.

KHOISAN AND CLICK LANGUAGES

The Khoisan languages are non-Bantu African languages characterized notably by the original and extensive use of click consonants. Clicks are also found in a number of Bantu languages, but these have arisen through assimilation from the Khoisan languages during periods of contact. The term "click language" is therefore a purely typological one referring only to languages in which click consonants are an integral part of the phonology. In this sense, click languages are restricted to Africa.

Joseph Greenberg has claimed that the Khoisan languages are members of one family with varying degrees of relationship to one another. The greatest concentration of these languages, both historically and at present, is in the whole of southern Africa from Angola through Zimbabwe to Swaziland, but today almost all speakers are found in Namibia and Botswana. Greenberg's Khoisan family includes two Tanzanian languages, Hadza (or Hatsa) and Sandawe, whose relationship to the southern African Khoisan languages is at best extremely remote, and to one another has still to be convincingly demonstrated.

Within the southern African Khoisan languages three clear groups exist. These are the Zhu (or Northern), the Khoi (or Central) and the Qwi (or Taa, or Southern) groups. The Zhu and Qwi languages are frequently referred to as San languages, but this is completely misleading linguistically because they do not form a distinct group of related languages.

Greenberg's attempt to demonstrate relatedness between the Khoisan languages relied on the technique of mass comparison because the conventional comparative method fails for these languages. According to the comparative method, words in different languages are "cognate" or related to a reconstructed original "proto" form for a word, from which the observed differences between languages can be derived by rules of sound change. In cases where geographic isolation and great time depth separate languages, they may undergo changes that are not amenable to this method of analysis. By contrast, mass comparison searches only for plausible similarities between words in large numbers of languages and bases claims of linguistic relatedness between them on the weight of the shared forms. Since judgments of similarity may be subjective, the technique had been criticized as insufficiently rigorous. For this reason, some scholars reject Greenberg's claims. Ernst Westphal argued that the three southern African Khoisan groups and Hadza and Sandawe are unrelated families with only some typological similarities (notably click consonants). If there are indeed genetic relationships between the groups of Khoisan languages, they will involve very great time depths, in excess of six thousand years.

The vitality of the southern African Khoisan languages has been influenced in historical times by the dominant European (largely Dutch and Afrikaans) and Bantu (largely Nguni) cultures. This led to dramatic language shift and ultimately to the death of all the Khoisan languages of South Africa.

Negative attitudes toward the surviving southern African Khoisan languages and their speakers persist to this day. Nevertheless, there are a number of southern African Khoisan languages that are more or less vital, such as the Khoi languages Nama (Namibia), with about 100,000 speakers; Naron (Botswana), with about 12,000 speakers; Gcwi and Gxana (Botswana), with about 6,000 speakers; the Zhu language (Namibia and Botswana), with about 11,000 speakers; and Qxong (Botswana), a southern African Khoisan language with fewer than 3,000 speakers. In Tanzania there are about 800 Hadza and 70,000 Sandawe speakers.

There is no mutual intelligibility between the languages of the three southern African Khoisan groups, and therefore bilingualism is found only at points of language contact. In addition, many southern African Khoisan-speakers are bilingual to some degree in a Bantu language (Herero in Namibia; Mbukushu, Tswana, and Kgalagadi in Botswana). There is also restricted bilingualism in Afrikaans, particularly in Namibia. Language mixing is common.

Internal language change in the Khoi group involves the replacement in some dialects of certain click consonants with acoustically similar non-clicks; a voicing contrast between stops (for example, *d* vs. *t* or *g* vs. *k*) has been reinterpreted in Nama as a tonal contrast. In some Khoi varieties, the masculine, feminine, and common gender suffixes found on Nama nouns are incomplete and may even be omitted. In the Taa group, Qxong has developed a unique noun class and concordial system in which various words in a sentence must bear a suffix that shows agreement with the class of governing noun. Nothing like this is found in the other language of the southern group.

Historically, some Khoisan languages have had a considerable impact on the phonologies and lexicons of certain Bantu languages. The most dramatic and best-documented case involves the South Afri-

can language Xhosa, whose phonology and lexicon were extended under the influence of Khoi language some 500–700 years ago. Other Bantu languages showing varying degrees of Khoisan linguistic influence are Zulu (South Africa), Sotho (Lesotho), Gciriku (Botswana), and in Tanzania the Cushitic language Dahalo.

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ANTHONY TRAILL

See also **Linguistics**.

NIGER-CONGO LANGUAGES

In *The Languages of Africa* (1963), Joseph H. Greenberg introduced the name Niger-Congo for a language family or phylum which included what had earlier been known as the Western Sudanic and Bantu language families. For the internal classification of Niger-Congo, he generally followed Diedrich Westermann (*Die westlichen Sudansprachen*, 1927) in dividing his family into six branches. A comparison of the two classification systems appears in table 1.

Greenberg made four major changes to Westermann's classification. He added Ffulde (Fula, Peul) to the West Atlantic branch, grouped specifically with Wolof and Serer. He included Westermann's Togo Remnant languages with Kwa. He included the whole of Bantu within Benue-Congo;

TABLE 1. Branches of Niger-Congo Compared with Western Sudanic

Greenberg (1963)	Westermann (1927)
West Atlantic	West Atlantic Group
Mande	Mandingo Languages
Gur	Gur Languages
Kwa (including Togo Remnant)	Kwa Languages
Benue-Congo	Togo Remnant Languages
Adamawa-Eastern	Benue-Cross Group (not included)

the change of name from Benue-Cross was intended to emphasize the southward extension of Niger-Congo which results from the change. Finally, Greenberg added the Adamawa-Eastern branch, which had not been considered by Westermann. After some initial controversy over the position of Bantu, these changes were all generally accepted by the 1980s.

Greenberg originally classified Kordofanian as a separate language family. In 1963 he treated it as a coordinate branch to Niger-Congo and named the resultant phylum Niger-Kordofanian.

Some major modifications of Greenberg's classification, and many corrections of detail, have been made in the light of the discussion aroused by his work and the greatly increased knowledge of African languages. "South-Central Niger-Congo," an influential study by Patrick R. Bennett and Jan P. Sterk (in *Studies in African Linguistics* 8 [1977]: 241-273), together with proposals by John Stewart, resulted in a working consensus used in *The Niger-Congo Languages* (1989), edited by John Bendor-Samuel and summarized in figure 1. Most of the changes in classification were proposed by Bennett and Sterk, but the terminology follows a pattern initiated by Stewart and developed in the Bendor-Samuel work. This classification differs from Greenberg's in several ways. Bennett and Sterk proposed an initial three-way branching of

Mande, Kordofanian, and the remaining languages grouped together as Atlantic Congo. The Bendor-Samuel work further proposed a second, tentative three-way branching between Atlantic (=West Atlantic), Ijoid (=Ijo, included by Greenberg within Kwa, and Defaka), and the remaining languages, named Volta-Congo by Stewart. It is possible that Ijoid branches off at a lower point than Atlantic.

Within Volta-Congo, the Bendor-Samuel volume proposed multiple branching:

- a) Kru (included by Greenberg within Kwa, and suggested by Bennett and Sterk as part of North Volta-Congo);
- b) (New) Kwa, differing from Greenberg's Kwa by the excision, proposed by Bennett and Sterk, of Ijo, Kru, and "Eastern" Kwa (essentially the languages of Nigeria which were classified by Greenberg as Kwa);
- c) (New) Benue-Congo, differing from the Benue-Congo of Greenberg by the addition, proposed by Bennett and Sterk, of "Eastern" Kwa to the original Benue-Congo;
- d) the excision of Dogon from Gur; and
- e) the grouping of Gur and Adamawa-Ubangi (=Adamawa-Eastern) as North Volta-Congo.

There have been repeated suggestions that Niger-Congo forms part of a super-phylum

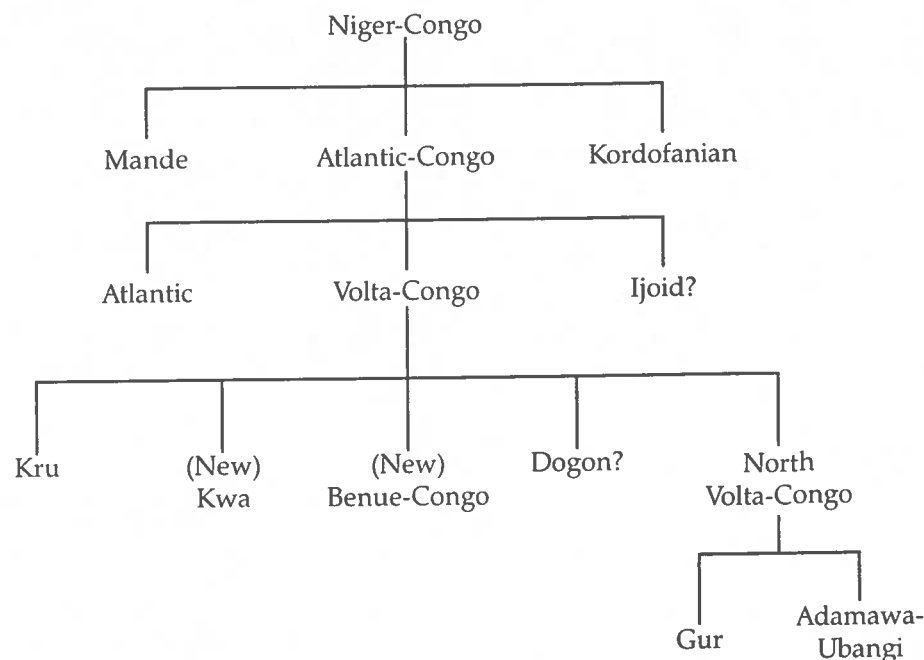


FIGURE 1. Classification of Niger-Congo (BENDOR-SAMUEL 1989)

together with Greenberg's Nilo-Saharan. Such a larger unit would correspond roughly to Westermann's Sudanic phylum, comprising Western Sudanic (=Niger-Congo) and Eastern Sudanic (=Nilo-Saharan). In the *Journal of African Languages* 4 [1972]: 46–56 Edgar A. Gregersen revived this idea, renaming the super-phylum Kongo-Saharan in an article by that name. Roger Blench, in the *Fifth Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium* (1995), specifically proposed that rather than Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan being coordinate, Niger-Congo constitutes a family within Nilo-Saharan, most closely related to the Central Sudanic family.

Dispersion

Most branches of Niger-Congo are found in western Africa, which has therefore generally been considered to be its homeland. Kordofanian, spoken in the Kordofan Hills of Sudan, has been considered to be the result of an isolated migration from the west African homeland. Roger Blench has, however, pointed out that if Niger-Congo is correctly placed within the Nilo-Saharan phylum, the homeland is likely to be the Kordofan area, where Kadugli is still spoken; consequently most of the speakers of Proto-Niger-Congo must be assumed to have migrated to west Africa.

In the west African secondary homeland, the older branchings tend to be in the north and the younger ones in the south; presumably the desiccation of the Sahara was one cause forcing southward movements of sections of speakers. The speakers of Ubangi have spread back toward the east through central Africa, while the dramatic expansion of Bantu speakers into central, eastern, and southern Africa has been extensively discussed by historians.

It is not possible to give any accurate figure for the number of speakers of Niger-Congo languages. The Niger-Congo language with the widest dispersion is the Atlantic language Ffulde (Fula, Peul), found in western, central, and even eastern Africa. Other languages with three million or more speakers include the Manding cluster (Mande); Wolof (Atlantic); Moore (Gur); Sango (Ubangi); Akan and the Gbe cluster, including Ewe and Fon (Kwa); Yoruba, Igbo, and Ibibio-Efik (new Benue-Congo); and the Bantu languages Gikuyu, Kongo, Losengo (including LiNgala), Luba-Kasai, Nguni cluster (including LiNgala), Xhosa, and Zulu), Nyanja (including Chewa), Rundi-Rwanda, Shona, and Swahili.

Borrowings and Modifications

The most dramatic case of phonological borrowing is the borrowing of clicks from Khoisan by some

of the Southern Bantu languages. Robert K. Herbert, in "The Sociohistory of Clicks in Southern Bantu" (*Anthropological Linguistics* 32 [1990]: 295–315), has suggested Khoisan wives of Bantu speakers, culturally required to avoid words which resembled names of the dead, replaced the tabooed terms with words from their first language, where clicks were common. Their children grew up speaking the Bantu language of their fathers but with certain words replaced by words of Khoisan origin which contained clicks. Studies of lexical borrowings between Niger-Congo languages and their neighbors, including Songhai and Chadic, have often been inconclusive because cultural words in particular tend to have a cross-linguistic distribution within a geographical area, so that it is frequently impossible to determine which is the donor and which the recipient language.

A few Niger-Congo languages have been simplified in structure as the result of being adopted as a lingua franca. Examples include the Bantu language of Swahili spoken in east Africa, which has lost its tones; Tuba (Kituba), a Kongo-based creole spoken in Zaire; Fanagolo, a Xhosa-based pidgin spoken in South Africa; and the Ubangi language Sango, a Ngbandi-based creole spoken in central Africa.

Notable Linguistic Features

Widespread phonological features of Niger-Congo include the common use of labial-velar stops and vowel harmony systems based on the expansion or contraction of the pharynx, often referred to as ATR (Advanced Tongue Root). With very few exceptions, Niger-Congo languages are tone or occasionally pitch-accent systems. The most outstanding morphological feature of Niger-Congo is the occurrence of a noun class system with concord. Bantu languages provide the clearest examples. Typically, the nouns are divided into a number of classes, each of which is marked by a prefix. The prefix changes to mark the plural of the noun: e.g., in Swahili *ki-tabu* ("book"), *vi-tabu* ("books"). Other words in the sentence which agree with the noun show a concord prefix: e.g., *ki-tabu ki-zuri* ("a good book"), *ki-tabu vi-zuri* ("good books"). Almost all branches of Niger-Congo either have such a system or show signs of having had one previously. Some branches, including Mande, Ijoid, Kru, and North Volta-Congo have suffixes rather than prefixes. Verbs often show a system of verbal extensions, which occur as suffixes to the verbs and modify the meaning and often the valency of the

verb root; typical verb forms expressed by extensions convey causative, reciprocal, separative, and benefactive notions.

In syntax, most Niger-Congo languages have Subject-Verb-Object word order, though Ijoid and Mande languages show full and partial Subject-Object-Verb order respectively. The occurrence of a series of verbs in a single clause, sharing a common subject and tense, and not linked by "and," is extremely widespread.

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KAY WILLIAMSON

See also *Linguistics and the Study of Africa*.

NILO-SAHARAN LANGUAGES

Nilo-Saharan is one of the four generally accepted language phyla in Africa. Besides Niger-Kordofanian, Khoisan, and Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic), Nilo-Saharan is the most recent of the established groupings. Joseph Greenberg proposed the new unit in 1963. Earlier, the languages concerned were considered to consist of twenty-two individual families, clusters, or isolated units without being grouped under a larger unit. Before Greenberg arrived at a Nilo-Saharan phylum, he had proposed three linguistic units: Eastern Sudanic, Central Sudanic, and Koma. In a second step Eastern and Central Sudanic were joined together with Temein, Teuso, Berta, and Kunama in a Macro-Sudanic branch which he renamed later as Chari-Nile. To this he joined Songhai, Saharan, Maba, For, and Koma.

The Nilo-Saharan languages stretch from western to eastern Africa. They extend from the shores of the Niger River in Mali (Songhai) eastward to the Lake Chad area (Saharan), to Dar Fur (e.g., Maba, For), and to the Nile River in Sudan, and southward to Lake Victoria (Nilotic).

In addition to lexical agreement, Greenberg's criteria for the coherence of the Nilo-Saharan lan-

guages included similar personal pronouns, plural formatives, verbal extensions, and locative markers. A predominant feature is the nominal formative (Greenberg referred to it as "article") *k*, for example, Kanuri *âm* (people), *kâm* (person). Though Greenberg noted assumed lexical cognates, it should be admitted that the common lexical coherence within Nilo-Saharan is very limited and often not based on valid criteria, while lexical agreement in subgroups is apparent.

Greenberg's method was based on "mass comparison" (i.e., the comparison of surface forms in as many as possible languages of an assumed linguistic unit) and not the more reliable linguistic reconstruction. Though the latter might have revealed more accurate data, this would have hardly been possible at Greenberg's time of classification (1940s–1960s). Many then-existing linguistic analyses were—and still are—too scanty to allow in-depth analyses. The branches of Nilo-Saharan according to Greenberg's 1963 classification are shown in figure 1. The defunct Meroitic was also proposed to be a member of Nilo-Saharan. However, linguistic data are too scarce to make reliable statements about its genetic affiliation.

In the 1990s there still is some controversy about the validity of the Nilo-Saharan phylum. Attempts to remove languages or language groups from Nilo-Saharan and link them with Afro-Asiatic or Niger-Kordofanian also continue.

Since 1980 regular conferences have been held in which the Nilo-Saharan issue is discussed. This has increased considerably knowledge of individual languages and linguistic affiliations within the phylum. Influenced by the data presented and the discussions held at the conferences, the most recent proposal of Nilo-Saharan subclassification was presented by M. L. Bender in 1995. Bender's classification differs from that of Greenberg in a decisive point. His model of linguistic relationship (figure 2) is not based on a straight hierarchic and genetic tree. By setting up a "core" and a "satellite" group as well as three outliers, Bender shows that areal features or contact phenomena are also included in order to obtain a clearer picture of the Nilo-Saharan complex.

Christopher Ehret proposed another Nilo-Saharan model (cited in Bender 1996; see figure 3): Ehret proposed for Proto-Nilo-Saharan an age of more than ten thousand years by relating linguistic and archaeological data. Whether this tentative chronological placement will prove to be accurate is at present not easy to confirm. The relatively poor

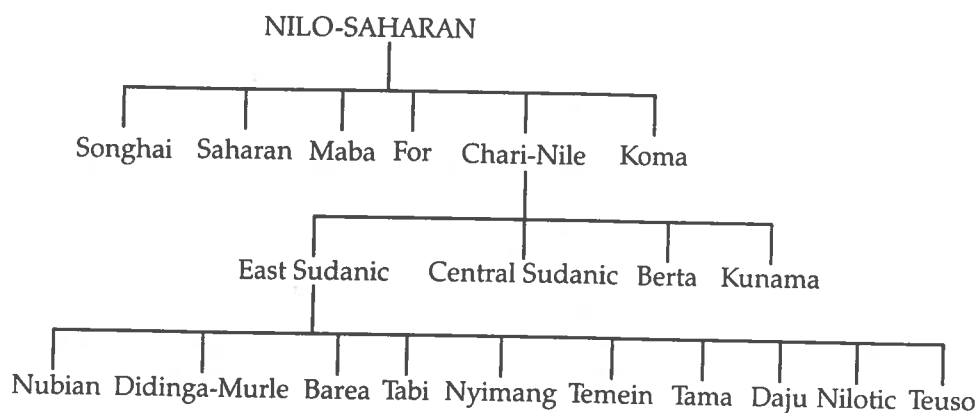


FIGURE 1. Greenberg classification of Nilo-Saharan languages.

lexical agreement between Nilo-Saharan subunits suggests that many of the languages have had intensive linguistic contact with members of other linguistic affiliations. Areal typological features also had their impact on the phylum. On the other hand, structural features in Nilo-Saharan and its subgroups were more resistant than lexical similarity. Therefore, a classification attempt primarily based on lexical comparison may not, in the Nilo-Saharan context, reflect the actual age of linguistic groupings and separations.

The most controversial member of Nilo-Saharan is Songhai, being the westernmost language of the phylum. The language was also connected with Niger-Kordofanian and Afro-Asiatic. Recent suggestions proposed that Songhai shares Nilo-Saharan Mande (Niger-Kordofanian) and Berber (Afro-Asiatic) features, thus being a creolized language.

The Saharan languages, too, have sometimes been connected with Afro-Asiatic, and even Niger-Kordofanian. However, this view is not generally accepted. One may rather assume that areal features have influenced the respective languages, so that the few existing similarities are a result of linguistic contact rather than genetic influence.

The total number of Nilo-Saharan languages comes to about 150. Only four of them are spoken by more than one million people: Songhai (1.2 million speakers in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria); Kanuri(-Kanembu) (3–4 million; Saharan, Nigeria, Niger, Chad); Luo (1.7 million; Nilotic, Kenya, Tanzania); and Dinka (1.2 million; Nilotic, Sudan). The documentation of Nilo-Saharan languages varies. Nilotic, Saharan languages (especially Kanuri) and Songhai have a longer research tradition. For other languages research has increased over the last few decades—for example,

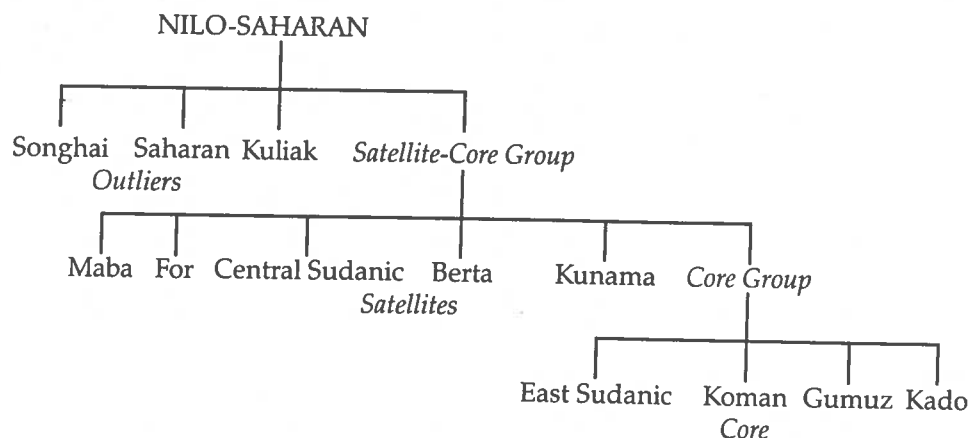


FIGURE 2. Bender classification of Nilo-Saharan languages.

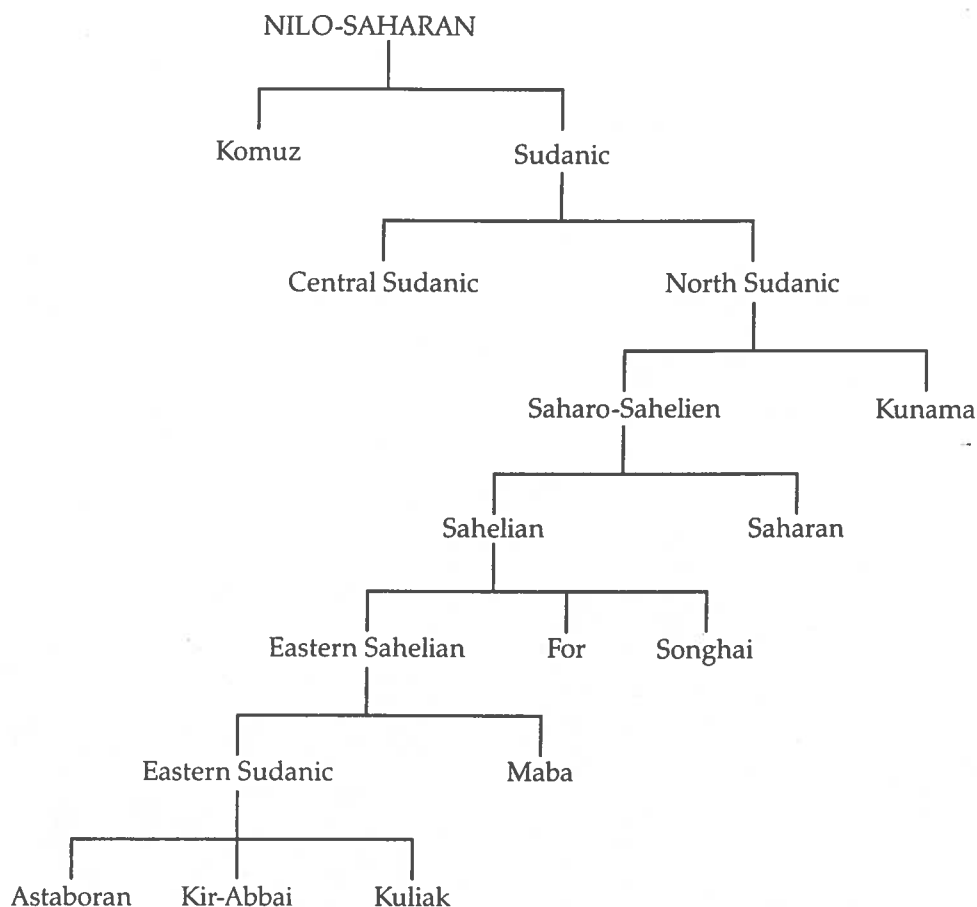


FIGURE 3. Ehret classification of Nilo-Saharan languages.

in the cases of Maba and For—while for a greater number of languages a good documentation is still lacking.

The concept of Nilo-Saharan is still vague and sometimes diffuse. However, the discussion of the subject after Greenberg's proposal in 1963 led to an intensified consideration of the issue. Extensive research in Nilo-Saharan linguistics during the past decades provided a clearer picture on the structure of individual languages in specific and on the status and validity of Nilo-Saharan in general. The initial criticism of Greenberg's new phylum receded continuously as evidence in favor of Nilo-Saharan became greater. While many believed Nilo-Saharan to be a remnant group which could not be affiliated with the other, more established, phyla, it became over the past years increasingly a reality, though the internal classification may still be puzzling. One of the problems in tackling the Nilo-Saharan phenomenon was a methodological one. It has become evident that historical reconstruction may not be

the only approach to understand the Nilo-Saharan complex. Many of the languages were exposed to speakers of languages with different linguistic affiliations (Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Kordofanian). Mutual linguistic influence may have taken place over a long period of time. This has led to a large amount of diversity, on the one hand, and on the other to a considerable amount of structural and conceptual retention of linguistic features over the long period of common membership.

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See also *Linguistics and the Study of Africa*.

LANGUAGE USE

[Coverage consists of subentries of *Language Contact*, the *Impact of Missions on Language*, *Language Policies*, *Language Choice in Writing*, and *Drum Language*.]

LANGUAGE CONTACT

Two or more languages are in contact if they are used alternately by the same speakers. In contact situations, all of the languages involved may continue to be used as in-group media and one or several among them as intergroup media. It is also possible that one or several of the languages in contact become obsolete and are replaced by one of the remaining languages. Research on language contact investigates behavior of the speakers of the different languages and the linguistic outcome resulting from that behavior.

The alternate use of two or more languages is not restricted to the choice of specific languages for specific communicative situations. When it happens within the same speech, we speak of code-switching and/or codemixing, a phenomenon that has been investigated in several urban centers. Most of the cases described deal with codeswitching between a European and one or two African languages. Situations of switching or mixing between African languages have been described only in a few cases.

In Africa, where languages number over a thousand and where linguistic diversity is greater than on any other continent, language contact is the normal situation throughout the continent. Although one might a priori attribute the linguistic fragmentation of sub-Saharan Africa to very restricted contact beyond the speakers' own territories, it seems more probable that people do communicate over wide areas through multilingualism, either by using a lingua franca (by far the more common solution) or, in a few cases, by each group's learning several languages of their neighbors. This multilingualism, especially the contact of

vernaculars and vehiculars, appears to have saved many vernaculars with a small number of speakers from extinction.

The investigation of language contact from a historical perspective concentrates on the influences that different languages have exerted on each other by lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic borrowings or, in case of language shift, by structural interferences. Whereas the phonological, morphological, and syntactic borrowings, which occur subsequent to lexical borrowings, allow conclusions only about the direction and the intensity of contact, lexical borrowings in addition reflect cultural and economic aspects of the contact. For example, the borrowings from Arabic in Swahili, which abound in the domains of religion and jurisprudence, indicate that within these two domains contact was much more intense than in others. And the words of Cushitic origin for "milk" and "calf" in the Southern Nilotic languages of Kenya indicate that the Southern Nilotes acquired knowledge of cattle breeding from their Cushitic neighbors. Language shift investigated from a historical perspective may manifest itself by structural rather than by lexical interferences in the target language from languages that have become obsolete. The best-known substrate interference in African languages is the **t/*k* (**n/*k*) substrate found in many languages of various language families in northeastern Africa. Reflexes of the elements *t* and *k* occur as affixes to nouns marking singular and plural, respectively.

The intensity of language contact correlates with that of economic and social contact. It is obvious that the languages with the higher socioeconomic prestige, the superstrates, tend to be learned as second languages, and they serve as major sources for borrowings of all kinds into the substrates, rather than the other way around. The shorter the period in which a shifting group must acquire the target language, the less likely is their chance to acquire it completely and the more likely are interferences from their old language in the new one. Long periods of stable bilingualism preceding language shift may lead to complete or almost complete absence of traces from the obsolete language.

Unless there is a strong loyalty to the original low-prestige language(s), bilingualism may in the long run result in complete or partial shift from the original language to the target language. Partial shift means that the traditional language is given up, not by the community as a whole but only by a regional section of it, by only a social section of