**Bantu languages of Southern Africa: an overview**

“Speaking (of) Khoisan”: a symposium reviewing southern African prehistory.

Hilde Gunnink - Ghent University - hilde.gunnink@ugent.be

Koen Bostoen - Ghent University - koen.bostoen@ugent.be

**The Bantu expansion: from Cameroon/Nigeria to southern Africa**

![Map of the Bantu expansion](image)

Source: de Filippo *et al.* (2012)

**Southern Bantu**

Southern Bantu (cf. Doke 1954): many shared developments, but no single Proto-Southern-Bantu ancestor can be reconstructed due to lack of spirantisation and vowel merger in Sotho subgroup.

**Table 1: spirantization in Southern Bantu languages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirantization</th>
<th>No spirantization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proto-Bantu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nguni</td>
<td>fu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tsonga</td>
<td>fu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inhambane (Copi)</td>
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<td>Venda</td>
<td>ru</td>
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<td>Sotho</td>
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<td>Makua</td>
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</table>

*Source: Janson (1991/1992)*

**S.10: Shona**

- Korekore, Zezuru, Manyika, Karanga, Ndu, Kalanga
- early split from Southern Bantu (Ehret 1972; Finlayson 1987) or unrelated to Southern Bantu (Janson 1991/1992)
- similarities to Venda due to contact (Ehret 1972; Finlayson 1987)
S.20: Venda
- shared developments with Sotho (Janson 1991/1992)

S.30: Sotho
- Southern Sotho, Pedi (Northern Sotho), Tswana, Kgalagadi, Lozi
- outlier among Southern Bantu due to its seven vowel system and lack of spirantisation
  (Janson 1991/1992; Louw and Finlayson 1990; van der Spuy 1990)
- Southern Sotho has clicks, as does Kgalagadi (Dickens 1987)

S.40: Nguni
- Xhosa, Zulu, Swati, Ndebele, Phuthi, Ngoni
- all Nguni languages have clicks
- possibly closer to the Sotho languages than to other subgroups (van der Spuy 1990)

S.50: Tsonga
- Tswana, Tsonga (Shangaan), Rhonga
- possibly closer to Nguni than to other subgroups (Janson 1991/1992)

S.60: Copi
- Copi, Tonga
- virtually no data available

P.20: Makhua
- linked to Sotho through uncommon shared developments
  *mb / * nd / *ng > /p/ /t/ /k/
  *dinda ‘wait’
  Makhuwa -lita ‘wait’
  Tswana -leta ‘wait’ (Janson 1991/1992)

Bantu Botatwe
  - East
    - Shanjo, Fwe
    - Mbalangwe, Totela, Subiya
  - West
    - Soli
    - Lundwe
    - Toka, Leya
- Ila, Tonga, Sala, Lenje (de Luna 2010)

**Western Southern Africa: South-West Bantu/Njila**

South-West Bantu (Bastin *et al.* 1999) / Njila (Vansina 2004)

Njila (Vansina 2004: 277)
- Northern
  - Kwilu
    - Mbala
    - Pende, Sonde, Holo, Kwezo, Shinji, Minungu, Taba, Kosa?
  - Kwanza
    - Kimbundu, Libolo, Kisama, Ndembu, Hungu
    - Songo
    - Mbu
- Southern
  - Eastern
    - Lunda
      - Rund, Sala Mpasu, Mbal, Kete-Ipila
      - Southern Lunda (Ndembu)
    - Moxico
      - Lwena, Cokwe
      - Lucazi, Mbunda, Nyemba, Lwimbi, Mbwela, Ngangela
  - Kunene
    - Umbundu, Hanya-Ganda, Sele
    - Kwangari, Dciriku
    - Cimbebasia
      - Nyaneka, Nkhumbi
      - Kwanyama, Kwambi, Ndonga, Mbalanhu
      - Herero (and Mbanderu), Cimba, Dimba, Kuvale, Kwisi?

Unclassified
- Ndome

**Kavango**
- Mbukushu, Kwamashi, Manyo (Gciriku), Kwangali
- Mbukushu and Kwamashi closely related
- further subclassification of Kavango languages attempted but not achieved (Möhlig 1997)
- clicks in all Kavango languages except Kwamashi
Herero

- Dhimba/Himba, Herero
- Dhimba/Himba not mutually intelligible with Herero (Cameron and Kunkel 2002)
- possibly related to Wambo languages (Baucom 1972)

Wambo

- Northern
  - Kwanyama, Kafima, Evale
  - Mbalanhu, Dombondola, Mbandja
- Southern
  - Ndonga
  - Kwambi
  - Ngandjera, Kwaluudhi, Kolonkadhi, Eunda (Baucom 1972)

Yeyi

- Caprivi Yeyi (Namibia) and Ngamiland Yeyi (Botswana) (Gowlett 1997)
- position within Bantu unclear (Seidel 2005)
- extensive Khoisan influence

References


