

The Bantu expansion into East Africa through contact

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In order to retrace how the Bantu languages spread through East Africa we investigate non-Bantu lexical transfer into Bantu languages. We hope to supplement the information on subclassification of the EA Bantu languages, by information from language contact profiting from the fact that an important factor of lexical contact is with non-Bantu languages which renders it easier to recognise loans and the direction of transfer. Many of such non-Bantu loans into EA Bantu languages have been proposed earlier, notably by Ehret (1998) and earlier work, and Nurse (1979). We take these proposals as our point of departure and concentrate on South Cushitic and South Nilotic loans into EA Bantu languages. Philippson (2013) shows that a critical review of Ehret (1998) is in order and that the history for most of these words is rather complex. We test the hypothesis that a significant portion of EA Bantu languages entered Kenya East of Lake Nyanza where their proto-language was influenced by South Cushitic and South Nilotic. We assume that later influence from South Cushitic to Bantu is restricted to the area North of Kondoa to Lake Nyanza. However, there is a set of lexical transfers into languages of the southern half of Tanzania that we cannot explain by these contact scenarios.

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