

Sandawe language contact: Towards a linguistic map of early Tanzania

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This study presents lexical borrowing between Sandawe and neighboring languages, comprising Cushitic (Iraqw, Alagwa, Burunge, Kwadza), Bantu (Swahili, Gogo, Nyaturu, Nilamba, Mbugwe), and, secondarily, Southern Nilotic (Datooga, Maasai) and European languages (Portuguese, English). We created a comprehensive database of approximately 350 loanwords extracted from Dempwolff's analysis (1916), Kiessling & Mous's Proto-West Rift reconstructions (2003), and Ehret & Ehret's dictionary (2012). The loanword analysis primarily focuses on assessing phonological changes, but also includes morphological adaptations and semantic considerations, such as grouping and meaning narrowing/broadening. After, the identified connections were assessed based on their reliability and likelihood, and loan directionality to or from Sandawe was assigned. By examining lexical borrowing, we seek to construct a linguistic map, which delineates the contact layers and offers insights into the nature of early interactions and shared practices in the area. Lastly, results from this study will be presented in relation to historical and archeological findings on early inhabitation of East Africa. Testing the hypothesis that the transition from hunting-gathering to pastoralism was gradual, and that mixed practices may have emerged early on, may challenge the traditional belief that pre-Bantu archaeological evidence in Tanzania is Cushitic; instead, it could be indicative of Khoisan practices.