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Central, East, and Southern African Languages

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The languages of Central, East, and Southern Africa are, like the cultures in which they are embedded, diverse, dynamic, and vibrant. They offer a wealth of exciting structural, sociolinguistic, and comparative material, which is a key to our understanding of the human capacity for language.

More than 500 languages are spoken in this vast area and the majority of countries covered have a high degree of multilingualism, both because several languages are part of the public discourse and because speakers are smoothly manipulating different languages for different functions and in different contexts. These circumstances allow for, and sometimes force, the shifting of linguistic identities and allegiances, and are reflected in new linguistic structures and varieties due to language contact and migration, as well as the endangerment of many languages.

In terms of classification, all four African linguistic groups are represented in East and Southern Africa: Afroasiatic and Nilosaharan languages in northern East Africa; Khoisan languages in Southern Africa; and Niger-Congo (mainly Bantu) languages in the whole area. In addition, Afrikaans represents a Germanic language, and Malagasy belongs to the Austronesian family. The vast majority of languages in the whole region, however, are Bantu languages. Originating, as far as we can ascertain, from the Nigerian-Cameroonian borderland, Bantu languages have come to be used more widely during the last three millennia and are now spoken throughout the larger part of Central, East, and Southern Africa.

Bantu languages are structurally characterized by a complex noun class system according to which each noun is grouped into a specific class marked by a prefix which must agree with dependent elements. Most Bantu languages have between 15 and 20 classes, including a number of singular-plural paired classes. In addition to noun classes, the study of Bantu tone, verb structure, agreement and constructions involving the equivalence of English pronouns, have contributed profoundly to developments in these areas in general linguistics.

Many, probably most of the languages of East and Southern Africa have not yet been comprehensively documented. More study would very likely illustrate further how much the languages from this part of the world can tell us about the cultures and histories of the region, and about the nature of language in general.

The languages covered in the following pages are prominent languages of the area and among the largest in terms of numbers of speakers. They include fourteen feature languages: Zulu, Shona, Malagasy, Nyanja, Kinyarwanda, Luba, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Kirundi, Gikūyū, Swahili, SeSotho, Tswana, Kituba; as well as 32 languages for which a shorter overview is provided: Northern Sotho, Luo, Runyakitara, Sukuma, Tsonga, Umbundu, Ganda, Luyia, Bemba, Lomwe, Kongo, Kimbundu, Makuwa, Kalenjin, Kamba, Lingala, Yao, Swati, Gusii, Ndebele, Chaga, Tumbuka, Wambo, Tonga, Makonde, Meru, Nyamwezi, Chokwe, Zande, Gogo, Nyakyusa, Sena.

Zulu (10.7million speakers)

Zulu, or isiZulu, is a Bantu language spoken in South Africa. The majority of Zulu speakers live in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, but Zulu is spoken throughout South Africa, including 1.9 million speakers in Gauteng province. Zulu is one of the 11 official languages of South Africa and is widely used in the media, the national and provincial parliaments, and daily life, as well as at all levels of education. It is also spoken in the neighboring countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique, and is taught at universities and language schools throughout the world. Zulu is part of the Nguni group of Bantu languages and most closely related to Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele.

Zulu has a rich tradition of literature, both oral and, more recently, written. Traditional literature includes oral poetry, for example praise songs (*izibongo*), which use a rich poetic language of metaphors and special grammatical constructions. Contemporary literature includes poetry, fiction, and drama. In addition, there are a number of Zulu newspapers and magazines, as well as radio and television programmes.

The development of Zulu is closely linked to the political history of Southern Africa. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Zulu was used by the small Zulu clan, who lived among a number of other Nguni-speaking groups in what is today KwaZulu-Natal. By the 1830s, a large number of these groups had been incorporated into the Zulu Empire of Emperor Shaka (1787-1828), and Zulu developed from a dialect spoken in a wide dialect continuum into the language of the expansive Zulu nation.

Panel 1: Clicks

When Nguni-speaking people first arrived in Southern Africa, they came into contact with Khoisan-speaking people, and during an extended period of contact the Nguni speakers adopted click sounds characteristic of Khoisan. Today, three click sounds are used in Zulu, represented in the orthography as *c*, *q*, and *x*.

Panel 2: Hlonipha

Hlonipha is a special form of Zulu which is traditionally only spoken by married women. It is a so-called avoidance language, as women have to avoid using words that sound like the names of any of their close male relatives. As a result, hlonipha vocabulary may differ widely from the standard vocabulary, so that, for example, the word for "day," *umuhla*, becomes *umugca*. Forms of hlonipha are also found in related Nguni languages such as Swati and Xhosa.

Shona (10.6 million speakers)

Shona is a Bantu language spoken mainly in Zimbabwe with some speakers in southern Zambia, Mozambique, and Botswana. There are also an estimated 2 million second-language speakers of Shona in Zimbabwe. The main dialects are Kalanga, Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, Ndau, and Zezuru. The term “Shona” was first used by the South African linguist Clement Doke (1893-1980) in 1931 to consolidate the amalgamation of mutually intelligible dialects.

The origins of the Shona can be traced back to the Monomotapa Empire — the first major civilization established in Zimbabwe about 1420 among the Karanga people at Great Zimbabwe. At the height of the Monomotapa civilization, it was part of a gold trade network that extended as far as China.

Together with Ndebele and English, Shona is an official language of Zimbabwe spoken by 80 percent of the population. The orthography of Shona was codified in the early twenty-first century and it is taught in schools but not used as a medium of instruction. Although the Karanga and Zezuru dialects may be considered the basis of standard Shona, all dialects are equally acceptable in schools where they are taught locally. There is a strong genre of Shona literature starting with the first novel written in the language in 1956, as well as good language resources such as grammars and dictionaries.

Panel 1: Shona names

Names of people and places in Shona often consist of full sentential meaning relaying an event around the time of birth or the significance of a place:

Domboramwari God's stone
Harare He doesn't sleep (there)
Zimbabwe Stone house
Tafadzwa (common first name) We are happy
Fungai (first name) Think
Tatenda (first name) We thank
Tapiwa (first name) Gift
Tsitsi (first name) Mercy
Takafakare (last name) We are already dead!
Hazvine (first name) No matter

Panel 2: Shona slang

Shona, particularly as used by groups of young people in Harare, incorporates many slang terms usually borrowed from English or Ndebele. Shona slang usually “nativizes” foreign borrowings to make them conform to the constraints imposed by the structure of Shona, but not always so. Some examples of English influence that mainly involve adding the consonant -z towards the end of the word are as follows:

<i>Bigaz</i>	big	<i>geliza</i>	girl	<i>boyz</i>	boy
<i>pini</i>	pin	<i>dhombi</i>	dollar	<i>monaz</i>	morning
<i>taimi</i>	time	<i>mafella</i>	fellows	<i>tolaz</i>	tall
<i>tonaz</i>	town	<i>dhawezi</i>	down	<i>Halemu</i>	Harare
<i>kulazi</i>	cool	<i>chilaz</i>	chill	<i>coldaz</i>	cold

Malagasy (10.4 million speakers)

Malagasy is mainly spoken in Madagascar where it is the official and national language, but it is also spoken in other Indian Ocean islands including Reunion, Comoros, and Mayotte. Malagasy belongs to the West Indonesian branch of Hesperonesian. It is related to the Malayo-Polynesian languages of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and more closely to the southeastern Barito group of languages spoken in Borneo, particularly Maanyan.

There are eighteen dialects of Malagasy. Merina (sometimes also called Houa or plateau Malagasy) is the standard. Malagasy is not related to the African languages spoken nearby but it contains words borrowed from Bantu languages, Arabic, and French, the former colonial language, which still enjoys official status, and also English, thanks mainly to the eighteenth-century pirates who made the island their base.

The language has a written literature dating back to the fifteenth century, and a rich tradition of oral and poetic histories and legends. Malagasy is broadcast on radio and television, and there are daily newspapers in Malagasy. In addition, the Ministère de l'Information's monthly *Bulletin de Madagascar* contains Malagasy linguistic issues and studies.

From the fifteenth century to 1823 Malagasy had an Arabic-based transcription called *Sorabe*, used by a group called Antemoro. This was replaced by a standardized Latin-based orthography.

Panel 1: Malagasy word order

Malagasy has the unusual verb-object-subject word order typical of other Austronesian languages such as Old Javanese and Fijian.

Mamaky boky ny mpianatra
reads book the student
'The student is reading the book'

Nividy ronono ho an'ny zaza ny vehivavy
bought milk for the child the woman
'The woman bought milk for the child'

Another somewhat unusual feature of Malagasy grammar is that demonstrative determiners are repeated both before and after the noun so that, for example, "this book" is literally "this book this": *ity boky ity*.

Panel 2: Malagasy poetry

Jean Joseph Rabearivelo (1901–1937) was a Malagasy poet writing in both Malagasy and French. He is often considered the father of modern Malagasy literature. His work shows an affinity with both the symbolist and surrealist poets, while remaining strongly grounded in the geography and folkloric life of Madagascar. His complete works are as follows: *La Coupe de cendres* (1924), *Sylves* (1927), *Volumes* (1928), *Enfants d'Orphée* (1931), *Presque-Songes* (1934), *Traduit de la Nuit* (1935), *Imaitsoanala* (1935), and *Chants pour Abéone* (1936).

Nyanja (9.3 million speakers)

Nyanja (or Chinyanja/Cinyanja) is one of the major transnational languages of Central Africa, spoken in Malawi, eastern Zambia, northern Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. In Malawi, where the language is also known as Chichewa, it was the national language from 1968 until the early 2000s and is used in education, public discourse, and the media. In Zambia it is the lingua franca of the Eastern Province as well as one of the two main national languages of wider communication, and is spoken by about 20 percent of the population as their first language. In Mozambique it is the first language of about half the population of the northern Tete Province.

The first Nyanja speakers came to present-day Malawi in the sixteenth century from their previous homelands in the lower Congo basin. They established the Maravi kingdom (the base of the modern name of the country) and spread their influence southwards and eastwards. During British colonial times, Nyanja was used by missionary societies in their fight against the slave trade. Partly due to the different ethnic names that local groups of Nyanja speakers adopted, the language became known by a variety of different names: Chinyanja, Chimang'anja, Chipeta, Chinyasa, or Chichewa (*chi-* is a Nyanja prefix meaning “language”). Chichewa was the name adopted in Malawi under the rule of Kamuzu Banda (c. 1896–1997), himself a Chewa, while in all other countries, the language was known as Nyanja. Since the 1990s increased linguistic work has been committed to the cross-border harmonization of Nyanja, making it a symbol of African regional cooperation.

Panel 1: Word order

Bantu languages typically show elaborate morphological marking on the verb (V), including subject (S) and object (O) markers. Consequently, the order of the subject and object in a sentence is very free, as the following Nyanja examples, taken from a classic article in Bantu syntax by Joan Bresnan and Sam Mchombo (1987), show:

<i>Njûchi</i>	<i>zi-ná-wá-lum-a</i>	<i>a-lenje</i>	(S-V-O)
bees	bite	hunters	
'The bees bit them, the hunters'			

<i>Zináwáluma</i>	<i>alenje</i>	<i>njûchi</i>	(V-O-S)
<i>Alenje</i>	<i>zináwáluma</i>	<i>njûchi</i>	(O-V-S)
<i>Zináwáluma</i>	<i>njûchi</i>	<i>alenje</i>	(V-S-O)
<i>Njûchi</i>	<i>alenje</i>	<i>zináwáluma</i>	(S-O-V)
<i>Alenje</i>	<i>njûchi</i>	<i>zináwáluma</i>	(O-S-V)

Panel 2: Language harmonization

As with many African languages, the first orthographies for Nyanja were developed by missionaries (who were not necessarily European). Different spelling conventions emerged from the different missions, partly reflecting orthographic conventions of the major European contact languages, in this case English and Portuguese. Further spelling reforms were undertaken by government agencies after independence (1964). Recently, increased efforts have been made to develop a uniform orthography for Nyanja that can be used in all countries where the language is spoken.

Kinyarwanda (9 million speakers)

Kinyarwanda is the main language of Rwanda and is spoken by about 9 million people throughout the country, as well as in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Uganda, and Tanzania. Kinyarwanda is closely related to Kirundi, the national language of Burundi, as well as to Kiha, spoken in Tanzania. Given the close relationship between these three languages, Kinyarwanda is probably understood by about 20 million people. It is a Bantu language of the interlacustrine (Great Lakes) group and is classified as D61 in Guthrie's (1967–71) classification. There are several dialects, including Ikireera, Ikigoyi, Igisoozo, Igikiga, Igishobyoy, Oluciga, Igihavu, Ururashi, Amashi, Ikiyaaka, and Ikinyanduga, on which standard Kinyarwanda is based. Kinyarwanda is the language of both Hutus and Tutsis, the two ethnic groups involved in the 1994 genocide, during which about a million Rwandans, mostly of Tutsi ethnic origin, lost their lives.

Kinyarwanda is used as a national and official language in Rwanda, and plays an important role in public life and in the media, where it is used in print and radio. It is also broadcast over the BBC, VOA, and Deutsche Welle. In addition, French and English are used as official languages and they play a role in government, administration, and academia. Kinyarwanda is used as a language of instruction in primary education, but is only taught as a subject in secondary and higher education, while the language of instruction shifts to French.

Panel 1: Kinyarwanda multiple object marking

As with many other Bantu languages, objects in Kinyarwanda can be expressed by so called object markers. This means that in comparison to English where pronouns which refer to persons, objects or places (e.g. *them, us, you, there* in the example below) are independent words, they are part of the verb *heera* 'to give' in Kinyarwanda (represented by *zi, tu, gu, ha*, respectively, in the example below).

ba-ra-zí-tú-gú-há-héera

'They are giving them to us for you there'

(Data from Kimenyi 1980: p. 183, A relational grammar of Kinyarwanda. Berkeley: University of California Press.)

Panel 2: Numbers

Counting in Kinyarwanda up to ten is as follows:

<i>-mwé</i>	one
<i>-biri</i>	two
<i>-tatu</i>	three
<i>-né</i>	four
<i>-taanu</i>	five
<i>-taandátu</i>	six
<i>-riindwi</i>	seven
<i>náani</i>	eight
<i>icyenda</i>	nine
<i>icúmi</i>	ten

Luba (7.8 million speakers)

Luba (also called Luba-Kasai or Tsiluba) is a Bantu language spoken in the Kasai-Occidental, Kasai-Oriental, and Katanga provinces of the southern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). There are distinct differences between the eastern and western Kasai region dialects, and between these dialects and the Katanga province dialect, which is called Ki-Luba.

The Luba originated from the relentless expansion of the Luba Empire (1585–1889), characterized by a centralized authority vested in a sacred king (*Mulopwe*), which dates back as far as 1500. The empire only began to diminish in 1870 as Arab slave traders and European invaders challenged notions of Luba supremacy. However, even today local customs and artistic styles continue to reflect a strong Luba influence.

Luba is one of the four national languages of the DRC and is a lingua franca for almost a million second-language speakers. Like the other three national languages (Lingala, Swahili, and Kongo), it is used as a medium of instruction in the first few years of primary education, dating back to the time of the occupation by the Belgians. Despite the large number of speakers, Luba is slightly overshadowed by the more widespread Lingala and Swahili, which many Luba also speak, in addition to French. The Luba people are vigilant in their efforts to retain their language, and those Luba living in areas where other lingua franca dominate usually send their children to private language schools where they can continue to learn Tsiluba. State and private media in the DRC use Tsiluba as well as the other national languages. Tsiluba has good language resources including an online Tsiluba-French dictionary.

Panel 1: Tonal relative clauses

Luba is a tone language. Tone is used not only to distinguish lexical items such as *kúbàlá* (to shine) from *kúbá lá* (to vibrate/tremble) but also grammatically to distinguish sentence types. Thus the difference between the (declarative) sentence in (a) and the (relative) sentence in (b) below is indicated by the difference in tone pattern on the auxiliary verb *uvwa*. This is in contrast to English where the relative pronoun “who” is used.

a.	<i>múntú</i> first person ‘The man killed the lion’	<i>ù-vwá</i> auxiliary	<i>mú-shípà</i> kill	<i>ntámbwé</i> lion
b.	<i>múntú</i> first person ‘The man who killed the lion...’	<i>ú-vwá</i> auxiliary	<i>mú-shípà</i> kill	<i>ntámbwé...</i> lion

Panel 2: Counting to 10 in Luba

<i>-mwè/mwà</i>	one	<i>sambòmbò(ù)</i>	six
<i>-bidì</i>	two	<i>bwandabutekète(a)</i>	seven
<i>-sàtù</i>	three	<i>mwandamukùlù</i>	eight
<i>-naayi</i>	four	<i>citeema</i>	nine
<i>-taanu</i>	five	<i>diikùmi</i>	ten

Xhosa (7.2 million speakers)

Xhosa is a tone language in the Nguni group of Bantu (classified as S40 in Guthrie's system). Xhosa is spoken in the Transkei coastal region of South Africa. It is one of the 11 national languages of South Africa, and is taught in primary and secondary schools. Xhosa is most closely related to the other Nguni languages: Zulu, Ndebele, and Swati. It is the second most common home language after Zulu in South Africa.

Xhosa is written using a Latin alphabet-based system. It has three basic click sounds represented orthographically by *c* for dental clicks, *x* for lateral clicks, and *q* for alveolar clicks. Tones are not indicated in the written form despite the fact that they differentiate lexical meaning. The presence of clicks in Xhosa is a reflection of contact with Khoi-San languages at some point in history. It is estimated that 15 percent of Xhosa vocabulary comes from its Khoi-San neighbours. Xhosa has also borrowed in recent times from Afrikaans and English.

The three basic click sounds can each be produced in five different ways, giving a total of 15 clicks in the language. The five dental clicks are made with the tongue on the back of the teeth, and are similar to the sound represented in English by "tut-tut" or "tsk-tsk" to reprimand someone. The five lateral clicks are made by the tongue at the sides of the mouth. The five alveolar clicks are made with the tip of the tongue at the roof of the mouth, and sound something like a cork pulled from a bottle.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) broadcasts in Xhosa on both radio (*Umhlobo Wenene* FM) and television, while films, plays, and music are also produced in the language. There is also an abundance of literary works in Xhosa, including prose and poetry, and newspapers and magazines.

Panel 1: The national anthem of South Africa

South Africa's national anthem is in Xhosa. The first verse is as follows:

*Nkosi, sikelel' iAfrika;
Malupakam'upondo lwayo;
Yiva imithandazo yethu
Usisikelele.*

Lord, bless Africa;
May her horn rise high up;
Hear Thou our prayers
And bless us.

Panel 2: Miriam Makeba's click songs

The best internationally known performer of Xhosa songs is Miriam Makeba (b. 1932) whose songs *Qongqothwane* and *Baxabene Oxamu* are known for their large number of click sounds. *Qongqothwane* ("The Knock-Knock Beetle," (known in English as *The Click Song*) is a Xhosa wedding song with the frequent occurrence of clicks:

*Igqira lendlela nguqongqothwane
Igqira lendlela kuthwa nguqongqothwane*

Sebeqabele gqithapha bathi nguqongqothwane
Sebeqabele gqithapha bathi nguqongqothwane

The diviner of the roadways is the knock-knock beetle
The diviner of the roadways is said to be the knock-knock beetle
It has passed up the steep hill, the knock-knock beetle
It has passed up the steep hill, the knock-knock beetle

Afrikaans (6 million speakers)

In terms of number of speakers, Afrikaans is the third-largest language in South Africa, and it is one of the 11 South African national languages. It is also frequently spoken in Namibia.

Afrikaans is closely related to Dutch and owes its presence in Southern Africa to the establishment in 1652 of a refreshment station of the Dutch East India Company for the company's shipping route to East Asia. The initially small Dutch community grew, and during the subsequent centuries came into contact with speakers of Khoisan languages; slaves brought from Dutch possessions in India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka; as well as speakers of other European languages.

Due to the heterogeneous linguistic situation during the formation of a distinct African variety of Dutch (Afrikaans means "African" in Dutch), Afrikaans is sometimes thought of as a semi-creole, and there are a number of non-Germanic features in Afrikaans, even though the syntax is similar to Modern Dutch. Over time Afrikaans speakers developed a strong sense of their own linguistic identity, and following two *Taalbewegings* (language movements) Afrikaans was standardized in 1925 and became an official language of South Africa.

During apartheid (1948–93), questions of language were highly politicized in South Africa and Afrikaans became associated with the oppressive regime, highlighted in the 1976 Soweto uprising that originated with schoolchildren protesting against the compulsory use of Afrikaans in black schools. Today, Afrikaans is widely used in South Africa and there are Afrikaans newspapers, television and radio stations, as well as a range of Afrikaans creative writing.

Panel 1: Double negation of uncertain origin

The syntax of Afrikaans is in many respects similar to Dutch. However, there are some surprising exceptions, for example the use of double negation:

Ek ken nie daardie man nie
I know not that man not
'I don't know that man'

(Data from Biberauer, 2006, p.1, Doubling vs. omission: Insights from Afrikaans. Online Proceedings of the workshop on syntactic doubling, Meertens Institute Amsterdam, p1-36. <http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/projecten/edisyen>)

This is quite unlike Modern Dutch and indeed other West Germanic languages, and is sometimes thought of as evidence for the creole origin of Afrikaans.

Panel 2: Loanwords

The Afrikaans lexicon shows influences from a number of different languages: *geitjie* (lizard), *dagga* (cannabis), *kierie* (walking stick), and *abba* (carry) from Khoekhoe; *piesing* (banana), *rottang* (cane), and *blatjang* (chutney) from Malay; *milie* (corn/maize) and *kraal* (pen/corral) from Portuguese Creole; and *malie* (money), *aikôna* (no), and *hokaai* (stop) from South African Bantu languages. In turn, South African English has borrowed *veld* (bush), *braai* (barbecue), and *stoep* (veranda) from Afrikaans.

Kirundi (6 million speakers)

Kirundi is spoken in Burundi and is part of the Rwanda-Rundi group of the Bantu languages. There are also large groups of refugee settlements of Kirundi speakers in Uganda and Tanzania. Kirundi is mutually intelligible with neighboring Kinyarwanda spoken in Rwanda and it is also related to Ha in Tanzania.

Together with French, Kirundi is an official language of Burundi. It is broadcast both on radio and television, and there are also newspapers in Kirundi: *Ndongezi (Pacesetter)* founded by the Catholic Church and a weekly government-based newspaper called *Ubumwe (Unity)*. The educational and administrative system is conducted in French although Kirundi is used in the first few years of primary education. There has been a standardized Kirundi spelling system since the 1940s, but reportedly there are orthographic differences between Catholic and Protestant writings.

The three major ethnic groups in Burundi—the Twa, Hutu, and Tutsi—all speak Kirundi, although the Twa have a distinct dialect that is intelligible to the other groups. Descendants of the Pygmies, the Twa are the original inhabitants of present-day Burundi. The Hutu arrived from the west in a gradual migration between the seventh and the eleventh centuries. The Tutsi began to appear in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, migrating from the Nile region in present-day Sudan and Ethiopia.

The Kirundi people are historically a herding society, and the cow holds a great deal of symbolic power in the national culture and language. For example, a typical Kirundi greeting, *Amashyo*, translates as “May you have herds of cattle.” The language is full of references to cattle, which stand for health, happiness, and prosperity.

Panel 1: Distinctive tone

Like many tone languages, Kirundi does not only show distinctive vowel length where vowel length results in a difference in meaning, but also tonal distinction where a difference in tone results in different meanings for the same combination of sounds. Consider the illustration of vowel and tone contrast below. (Low tone is represented by a falling accent while an acute accent represents a high tone.)

Contrastive Vowel Length		Contrastive Tonal Melodies	
-saba	<i>ask</i>	kòròrà	<i>drop</i>
-saaba	<i>shatter</i>	kóròrà	<i>cough</i>
-fuungura	<i>eat</i>	ìntòòrè	<i>garden eggs</i>
-fuunguura	<i>open</i>	ìntóòrè	<i>small piece of dough</i>

Panel 2: Loanword sources

Kirundi has incorporated loanwords from Swahili, German, French, Lingala, and Luganda. This reflects the contact the language has had with these groups of people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Swahili was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century by ivory and slave traders from Zanzibar; German from a period of colonial rule and from the settlements of the missionary White Fathers from 1898; French from the period of Belgian rule in the First World War; Lingala from Congolese soldiers who occupied the country from 1932 to the late 1950s; and Luganda from the migration of Kirundi countrymen to the Uganda Protectorate from 1920 to 1960.

Gĩkũyũ (5.3 million speakers)

Gĩkũyũ (sometimes also Gikuyu or Kikuyu) is a major language of Kenya, spoken in *Kirinyaga* (The Shining Mountain) in west central Kenya, on the fertile slopes of Mount Kenya just north of Nairobi. Gĩkũyũ is a Central Bantu language closely related to Meru and Kamba. After Swahili (and English), Gĩkũyũ is among the most widely used languages of Kenya, and several Gĩkũyũ newspapers and magazines are available. The Agĩkũyũ people were closely involved in the fight against British colonialism, notably the Mau Mau rebellion (1952–60), and in Kenya’s post-independence politics.

Gĩkũyũ is particularly known for its modern literature. A number of Kenyan authors write in Gĩkũyũ, including Mwangi wa Mutahi, Gatua wa Mbugwa, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, one of the giants of African literature whose early works in English such as *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965) have become classics of African literature. In the 1970s Ngũgĩ started writing in Gĩkũyũ and his latest book in this language, *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* (*Wizard of the Crow*), appeared in 2006.

Panel 1: Gĩkũyũ or Kikuyu?

The spelling of the name of the language varies from Gĩkũyũ to Gikuyu to Kikuyu, the first usually regarded as the correct form. There are two linguistic backgrounds to this variation. On the one hand, Gĩkũyũ has a seven-vowel system where high and tense mid-vowels are distinguished in the orthography by the use of the tilde (). The vowels in the word *Gĩkũyũ* are thus not nasal vowels but rather tense mid-vowels. Using *i* and *u* without the tilde would (incorrectly) indicate high vowels. Secondly, Gĩkũyũ undergoes a so called voicing dissimilation process that disallows a sequence of two voiceless consonants, making the initial *k* in Kikuyu change to its voiced counterpart *g* resulting in *Gĩkũyũ*. Thus *Gĩkũyũ* represents the most accurate spelling of the name of the language.

Panel 2: Counting to 10 in Gĩkũyũ

-mwe	<i>one</i>
-gĩrĩ or -ĩrĩ	<i>two</i>
-tatũ or -thatũ	<i>three</i>
-na or -nya	<i>four</i>
-tano or -thano	<i>five</i>
-tandatũ or -thandatũ	<i>six</i>
mugwanja	<i>seven</i>
-nana or -nyanya	<i>eight</i>
kenda	<i>nine</i>
ikumi	<i>ten</i>

Swahili (5 million speakers)

Swahili is a Bantu language spoken by about 5 million first-language speakers, and by an additional 50 million second-language speakers. It is the main language in East Africa, spoken in Tanzania and Kenya, where it is a national language, and parts of Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mozambique, as well as by expatriates throughout the world. Swahili belongs to the Sabaki group of the Northeast Bantu languages.

Swahili has been spoken on the East African coast since about 800 CE, after Bantu-speaking people from the Great Lakes region reached it. Due to maritime trading, the language became established in Swahili settlements along the coast from Mogadishu to Cape Delgado. Through contact with Arab traders, many Swahili became Muslims, and loanwords from Arabic have entered the language over the centuries, leading to the mistaken belief that Swahili is a “mixed” language.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Swahili spread along trade routes beyond the coast, and it was used as a language of administration in the British colonial period. After independence in Tanzania (1961) and Kenya (1963), Swahili became their national language and shared an official status with English. In Tanzania, and to a lesser extent Kenya, Swahili is widely used today in public administration, (mostly primary) education, and the media. Especially in urban centers, Swahili is increasingly the first language of younger Tanzanians and Kenyans, sometimes sprinkled with English and other African languages.

Swahili has a rich literary (especially poetic) heritage. The earliest surviving Swahili manuscripts, written in Arabic script, date to the first half of the eighteenth century. While Standard Swahili is based on the dialect of Zanzibar, the traditional centers for poetry are Lamu, Pate, and Mombasa in Kenya. More recently, literature in Standard Swahili includes fiction and drama, as well as poetry.

Panel 1: Structure

While the Swahili lexicon has many loanwords from other Bantu languages, as well as Arabic, Indian, and European languages, the grammatical structure of the language is very faithful to its Bantu historical roots. Thus, all Swahili nouns belong to one of sixteen noun classes, which differ in semantic meaning, morphology, and syntax. Verb roots can be changed by adding different derivational suffixes, and within sentences a complex agreement system operates.

Panel 2: Loanwords

Some Swahili words are found in English, the most well known probably being *safari* (journey). A number of others have recently entered English through the musical (and film) *The Lion King*: the characters *simba* (lion) and *rafiki* (friend) are Swahili, as is *hakuna matata* (no problem) and the greeting *Jambo*, a simplified version of the Swahili greeting *Hujambo?*, to which the reply is *Sijambo*.

Sesotho (4.8 million speakers)

Sesotho (also called Southern Sotho) is a southern Bantu language spoken in the south of South Africa, and is the national language of Lesotho. It is also one of the national languages of South Africa.

A unified orthography for Sesotho, Sepedi (Northern Sotho), and Tswana was proposed in 1945 but was never adopted. The first written form was devised by French missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission who arrived in Lesotho in 1833.

The dialects of Sesotho include Sekwena, Sephuthi, Setlokwa, and Setaung in the central region, and Sekgolokwe and Serotse in the northeastern region. The dialects are considered to be mutually intelligible and it is often said that Sesotho has very little dialect variation. It is most closely related to Tswana, Northern Sotho, and Lozi. An interesting feature of Sesotho, in contrast to other Bantu languages, is the nine-vowel system with three different heights in mid-vowels.

One of the earliest written works in Sesotho is *Litsomo tsa Basotho* (Legends of the Basotho), published in 1909 and 1911. There is an abundance of written literature in Sesotho and the highly acclaimed novel *Chaka*, which relays the notorious life of the Zulu warrior-king, was first written in Sesotho by Thomas Mafolo (published in 1925). Sesotho is used as a medium of instruction in Lesotho and can also be studied at the university.

Panel 1: Clicks

Sesotho has a large system of 40 consonants which includes click consonants inherited from Khoisan and Nguni languages. The three click sounds of the language are more adequately described as involving one click that is produced in three different ways, as radical (using the back of the tongue, nasal, or aspirated):

Radical:	<i>qeta</i> (finish)	<i>ho qoqa</i> (to chat)
Nasal:	<i>nqalo</i> (place)	<i>ho nqosa</i> (to accuse)
Aspirated:	<i>qhitsa</i> (drip)	<i>qhwaya</i> (wave)

Panel 2: Tsotsitaal

Sotho is one of the languages from which *Tsotsitaal* is derived. *Tsotsitaal* is an urban sociolect consisting primarily of a unique vocabulary and a set of idioms used (most commonly) with the grammar and inflexion rules of Sotho or Zulu. It is a part of the youth culture in most Southern Gauteng townships and is the primary language used in Kwaito music, a genre that emerged in Johannesburg in the early 1990s. *Tsotsi*, as in the title of the 2006 South African Oscar-winning film in the foreign-language category, translates as “thug,” so *tsotsitaal* (*taal* from Afrikaans “language”) translates as “thug-language.”

Tswana (4.5 million speakers)

Tswana, also called Setswana, is a Bantu language spoken in Botswana (1.1 million speakers) and South Africa (3.3 million speakers), and parts of Namibia and Zimbabwe. It is closely related to Sesotho and Northern Sotho. Tswana has eight dialects namely: Sekgatla, Sengwaketse, Sengwato, Sehurutshe, Serolong, Setlharo, Sekwena, and Setlhaping. Tswana is, next to English, the official language of Botswana with a large number of second-language speakers who use it as a lingua franca.

Standard Setswana incorporates features of all the eight dialects. Representatives from all dialects form the Setswana Language Board, which among other things is responsible for the standardization of the language to be used in schools and in the literature. This board has established one standard Setswana for all the dialects, and no single dialect can claim to have had a greater influence on the standard language.

Setswana is used in Botswana as the language of instruction in the first four years of education. In South Africa, Setswana is one of the eleven official languages recognized in the 1996 constitution and it enjoys legal rights in a number of official contexts. In Botswana a daily newspaper, *Dikgang Tsa Gompieno*, and a monthly newspaper, *Kutlwana*, are published in Tswana. Both the South African Broadcasting Company and Radio Botswana broadcast radio and television programs in Tswana.

Panel 1: Dialects

Among the eight Tswana dialects, four different groups can be distinguished on phonological grounds. The northern dialect's alveolar, voiceless stop /t/ corresponds to the southern dialect's lateral [l], orthographically spelt as /tl/, as for example in *tou* versus *tlou* (elephant) or *tala* versus *tlala* (famine). Furthermore, eastern and western dialects can be distinguished by /f/ versus /h/ respectively: *pheto* versus *pheto* (wind), or *-fisa* versus *-hisa* (burn).

Panel 2: Women pioneers in teaching Tswana

While foreign missionaries can be regarded as the heralds of western education in Botswana through the London Missionary Society who came to southern Africa in 1817 and translated the Bible into Tswana, education and particularly the teaching of reading and writing in Tswana is owed to women missionaries aided by Tswana women, themselves converts. Of importance are Kolebale and Semane Setlhoko who are considered pioneers of teaching Tswana, the latter having also tutored the first president of Botswana Sir Seretse Khama. (See P.T. Mgadla, 1997, *Missionary wives, women and education: the development of literacy among the Batswana 1840-1937*. PULA Journal of African Studies Vol 11, no.1: 70-81).

Kituba (4.3 million speakers)

Kituba is a Bantu Creole based on Kikongo. It originated in the late fifteenth century as a contact language between speakers of not entirely mutually intelligible varieties of Kikongo who were involved in trading along the River Congo, prompted by the Portuguese presence on the coast. Kituba's development into a creole was slow and gradual despite its widespread and regular use. However, the construction of the Brazzaville-Pointe Noire railroad at the beginning of the twentieth century gave the language new life; a grammatically simplified language evolved from railway workers of diverse linguistic backgrounds. By the 1940s, it had gained a community of native speakers that has also developed a written form.

Kituba was spoken by many Africans from the western Central African region who were taken into slavery and sold to the Americas. For this reason, the language is found in the rituals of African-derived religions in Brazil, Jamaica, and Cuba. It is also one of the sources of Gullah spoken in South Carolina and Georgia, and the Palenquero creole in Colombia.

Kituba is now an official language both in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and the Republic of Congo. It is also referred to as *Kikongo ya leta* ("Kikongo of the state administration") in the DRC and also as *Kikongo* for short, as differentiated from the Kikongo of the Bakongo people of the DRC and Angola. In the DRC, Kituba is the main lingua franca in the provinces of Kongo Central, Kwango, and Kwilu, and to a lesser extent Kinshasa, Mai-Ndombe, and Kasai. Most speakers of Kituba also speak other lingua francas in addition to French.

Borrowed words

Although the bulk of Kituba words come from Kikongo, other Bantu languages have influenced Kituba as well, including Kimbala, Kisongo, Kiyaka, Kiyansi, Lingala, and Swahili. There are also many borrowed words from French, Portuguese, and English. A few examples are as follows:

Kituba borrowed word		Source language
sandúku	(box)	(Swahili <i>sanduku</i>)
matáta	(trouble)	(Swahili <i>matata</i>)
letá	(state)	(French <i>l'état</i>)
sodá/solodá	(soldier)	(French <i>soldat</i>)
kilápi	(pencil)	(Portuguese <i>lápiz</i>)
mesa	(table)	(Portuguese/Spanish <i>mesa</i>)
katekisimu	(catechism)	(English "catechism")
bóyi	(boy)	(English "boy")

OTHER LANGUAGES

Northern Sotho (4.2 million speakers)

Northern Sotho, or Sesotho sa Leboa, is a southern Bantu language related to Southern Sotho and Setswana. It is spoken in the Transvaal province of northeastern South Africa. Sepedi is the main dialect on which the standard orthography of Northern Sotho, which consists of up to 30 dialects, is based. The division between Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, and SeTswana is based more on historical and social factors, as the three languages are mutually quite intelligible. Northern Sotho is one of the official languages of South Africa taught in primary and secondary schools. There is a fair amount of literature describing Northern Sotho, including grammars and dictionaries.

Luo (4 million speakers)

Luo is an eastern Sudanic language of the Nilo-Saharan family. It is spoken in southern Sudan, northern Uganda, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, western Kenya, and the northern tip of Tanzania. The Luo from Luoland in Kenya are the third-largest ethnic group after the Kikuyu and the Luyha, numbering over 3 million. Luo is taught in primary schools, and Luo speakers usually speak Swahili and English. Song is a popular genre of Luo culture, and most stories are also accompanied by song. *Gidi Gidi Maji-Maji* are a popular hip-hop duo in Kenya whose song lyrics are mostly in Luo mixed with Swahili and English. The internationally famous *Song of Lawino* was first written in Luo as *Wer pa Lawino* by the Acholi-born Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek (1931–1982).

Runyakitara (4 million speakers)

Runyakitara, a language spoken in western Uganda, is sociolinguistically remarkable for it only developed in the 1980s as a combination of the closely related varieties of Runyankore, Runyoro, Rutooro, and Rukiga. Through standardization, these four previously rather minor languages of Uganda, where more than 40 languages are spoken, have consolidated into one of the country's main languages, spoken by 20 percent of the population. Runyakitara is named after the Kitara kingdom of western Uganda, which was thriving from the fifteenth century onwards, but had declined by the nineteenth century and was further oppressed under British colonialism. Runyakitara today is used in radio, print media, and education.

Sukuma (4 million speakers)

Sukuma is a Bantu language spoken on the western and southern shores of Lake Victoria in northwestern Tanzania, a few hundred miles south of the equator. Sukuma is closely related to Nyamwezi. The two languages share close ethnic links and a high lexical similarity of over 80 percent. Kiya and Kigwe are the main dialects of Sukuma. Most speakers of Sukuma are bilingual with Swahili. The political influence of Swahili has meant that despite the large number of Sukuma speakers there is hardly any written literature in the language. Swahili being the sole official language, Sukuma has no official status in the educational or political sector, and the younger generation increasingly incorporate Swahili loanwords into Sukuma. However, Sukuma culture is rich in oral folklore and narratives that are also expressed in song.

Tsonga (4 million speakers)

Tsonga is spoken in the Limpopo province of South Africa and in Mozambique. There are also a few speakers in Zimbabwe and Swaziland. Tsonga is a Bantu language. There are various dialects, but the three most distinct are Xironga, spoken in Maputo and the surrounding areas in Mozambique; Xitshwa/Chihlengwe, spoken in Zimbabwe and in Mozambique; and Xitsonga, spoken in South Africa. All dialects have been influenced by Zulu, and as a result Tsonga now has click consonants in borrowed words. It has been referred to as a whistling language because of its whistling consonants such as *sw/sv*, *tsw/tsv*, and *dzw/dzv*, which are akin to Shona.

Umbundu (4 million speakers)

Umbundu is a Bantu language spoken in southern Angola in the provinces of Bié, Huambo, and Benguela. It is the most widespread Bantu language, spoken by about a third of the population. A decree passed by the Portuguese in 1919 required all Africans seeking education to speak Portuguese, reducing spoken Umbundu in the urban population. The Umbundu have lost much of their traditional culture during 500 years of Portuguese colonialism, 27 years of civil war, and the consequent migration of people to the urban centers, with most younger people speaking only Portuguese. The official language remains Portuguese, but Umbundu is one of the national languages and there are pilot projects currently underway to use it as a language of instruction in the first years of education.

Luganda (3.5 million speakers)

Luganda is a tone Bantu language spoken north of the northwestern shore of Lake Victoria in the Buganda province of Uganda. Luganda is a regional language, a lingua franca with a large number of second- language speakers and the official vernacular language of education in many school districts. A standardized orthography for Luganda was devised in 1947. Television and radio broadcasts are relayed in the language, and the Roman Catholic Church of Uganda publishes a magazine *Musizi* in Luganda. It is the most widely spoken second language next to English. There is little information on dialects of Luganda but it is closely related to Soga and Gwere.

Luyia (3.75 million speakers)

Luyia is a Bantu language spoken around Lake Victoria in the western province of Kenya and in Uganda. Luyia has more than 10 dialects representing an even larger number of ethnic groups. The Luyia are the second-largest ethnic group in Kenya. The origins of the Luyia can probably be reconstructed to the Bantu migrations out of Cameroon around 1000 BCE, but myth has it that they migrated from the north, coming from as far as Misri in Egypt. Luyia culture revolves around the extended family, and polygamy is allowed if the marriage is conducted under African traditional law or Muslim law.

Bemba (3.4 million speakers)

Bemba is a Bantu language spoken in the Northern, Luapula, and Copperbelt provinces of Zambia. Some Bemba is spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. The Bemba originate from the Luba-Lunda empires of the upper Congo basin. It is a tone language in which tone is used for lexical and grammatical distinction. It is one of the national languages of Zambia and an important lingua franca in the country. Bemba is the most widely spoken African language in Zambia, with many second-language speakers. There are about 18 ethnic groups that speak it. Bemba is taught in schools and there is a range of literature in the language. The Bemba are renowned for using proverbs as a form of expression. Popular music in Bemba, usually mixed with other African languages and English, is widespread.

Lomwe (3.3 million speakers)

Lomwe is a Bantu language spoken in southeastern Malawi and in the Zambezia province of Mozambique. The Lomwe are originally from what is now Mozambique to the east of Malawi, but today the majority (1.8 million) live in Malawi, having migrated there over a stretch of time before the missionaries (1861). A later Lomwe migration to Malawi happened in the 1930s due to tribal wars in Mozambique. The Lomwe are now one of the four largest ethnic groups in Malawi. However, the dominance of Chichewa in Malawi has radically diminished the use of Lomwe there, which is now spoken only among elders in rural areas. The long period of civil war in Mozambique has also badly affected the rural-dwelling Lomwe.

Kikongo (3.2 million speakers)

Kikongo, or Kongo, is a Bantu language spoken by the Bakongo people living in the tropical forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, and Angola. It is a tonal language that formed the basis for Kituba, a Bantu creole and lingua franca throughout much of western Central Africa. Kikongo was the earliest Bantu language committed to writing and had the earliest dictionary of any Bantu language. A Kikongo catechism was produced under the authority of Diogo Gomes, a Jesuit born in Kongo of Portuguese parents in 1557, but no version of it exists today. There is some confusion as to the present number of speakers of Kikongo, because the boundary with Kituba is not clear.

Kimbundu (3 million speakers)

Kimbundu is a Bantu language spoken in the provinces of Luanda, Bengo, Malanje, and Cuauxa-Norte in central Angola. The Kimbundu have their roots in the Ndongo Kingdom of Chief Ngola (from whom the country derives its name) established around the 1400s. They were subjugated by Portuguese colonists in 1671 after almost 100 years of resistance. Portuguese is the official language of Angola but Kimbundu is one of the six recently established official languages. Located close to the coast and to Luanda, the Kimbundu are more susceptible to Portuguese influences, and the younger generation usually speak a slang that is a mix of Portuguese and Kimbundu. There are some television programmes in Kimbundu but no written literature.

Makua (2.5 million speakers)

Makua (also written Makuwa or Makhuwa) is a Bantu language spoken in the central belt of Mozambique north of the Zambezi river. It is closely related to Lomwe. The Makua are the largest ethnic group in northern Mozambique and Makua is the most important indigenous language there. However, there is no grammar of Makua and it is not taught in schools. The main reason for this is the dominance of Portuguese as the national language, in addition to the almost three-decade civil war (1975-1992), epidemics, scanty economic resources influencing public investment in education, and natural disasters that have afflicted the country. There is, however, hope in sight as the teaching of national languages is currently under experiment in several schools of different provinces.

Kalenjin (2.5 million speakers)

Kalenjin represents a cluster of closely related dialects mainly spoken in the Kenyan western highlands and the Rift Valley. Kalenjin is classified as Nilo-Saharan of the Southern Nilotic group. There are about 12 dialects that came to be known collectively as Kalenjin in the 1940s but the peoples represented can be traced back to about 1500 CE. The main dialects are Keyo, Cherangany, Tugen, Nandi, and Kipsigis, including a few languages of Tanzania and Uganda. Some standardization of the dialects has been attempted but this is arguably yet to be fully completed. The creation of Kalenjin has played a crucial role in the stronger ethnic presence of otherwise small minority tribes and languages, as its people are now Kenya's fourth-largest ethnic group.

Kamba (2.5 million speakers)

Kamba is a Bantu language spoken in the eastern province of Kenya in an area southwest of Nairobi. Kamba has four dialect clusters: Masaku, South Kitui, North Kitui, and Mumoni. It has structural similarities to Kikuyu, which is spoken in close proximity. Kamba is one of the languages broadcast on the Kenya Broadcasting Cooperation. The Kamba people moved to their present location from western Tanzania (Unyamwezi) into the Usambara Mountains and eastern Kenya. The Kamba are known for their fine craft work in basketry and pottery. They perform spectacular dances displaying their athletic agility and acrobatic techniques.

Lingala (2.1 million speakers)

Lingala is spoken in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as in the northwestern province of Equateur and part of the Haut-Congo. Unlike other languages in the area, Lingala does not serve as the basis for a community but is a strong symbol of Congolese identity. There is a pidgin variety in the northeast called Bangala, which has many words in common with the traditional Congolese variety of Swahili, Kingwana. Lingala spoken in Kinshasa today has incorporated many loanwords from French, while still using the Lingala grammatical structures. It is probably the fastest-spreading language of the four lingua francas of the DRC, since it is the language of the army and of much popular music heard across sub-Saharan Africa.

Yao (2 million speakers)

Yao is spoken by about 1 million speakers in southern Malawi, and by about half a million speakers each in northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania. Despite the large number of speakers and its historical importance, Yao does not have any official status mainly because it is spread across three different countries, with other languages serving in official functions (Nyanja in Malawi, Portuguese in Mozambique, and Swahili in Tanzania). However, Yao is used in the media in Malawi, and as a cross-border language of wider communication it plays an important role in regional pan-African cooperation. Yao is well known to historians through one of the earliest historiographies of the region, Yohanna B. Abdallah's 1919 *Chiikala Cha Wayao (The Yaos)*.

Swati (1.7 million speakers)

Swati (also called Siswati or Swazi in Zulu) is a Bantu language of the Nguni group spoken in Swaziland and South Africa. Siswati is the national language of Swaziland and one of the official languages of South Africa. The literacy rate in Siswati is very high in Swaziland, and it is taught in all national schools and used in the media. Siswati manifests *depressor consonants* that provide an example of consonant-tone interaction where a low tone is placed on a vowel following a voiced (obstruent) consonant. Depressor consonants in Siswati also trigger a number of other phonological effects involving tone spreading, tone shifting, and the blocking of tone shift.

Gusii (1.6 million speakers)

Gusii is a Bantu language spoken in the Kisii district in western Kenya. Many Gusii speakers are bilingual with Luo. Located just 30 miles from Lake Victoria in the Nyanza province, the Gusii live in one of the most productive agricultural areas, making them fairly affluent. They are believed to have settled in this area around the 1800s originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Gusii have a strong oral tradition, and their folklore typically involves prominent figures linked to historical events, especially migrations into the current homeland and the arrival of the British. Naming is an important part of Gusii culture and children are usually given names according to the events surrounding their birth.

Ndebele (1.55 million speakers)

Ndebele is spoken in southwestern Zimbabwe around the city of Bulawayo, and also in South Africa. Ndebele belongs to the Nguni language cluster within Bantu. It is closely related to Zulu because the Ndebele were a breakaway group from the Zulu in 1821 at the height of the Shaka Empire (1817-1828) led by King Mzilikazi (1790-1868). Ndebele has three clicks sounds. It is the second-largest African language of Zimbabwe after Shona and is an official language that is taught in schools in the areas where it is spoken. A distinction can be made between northern Ndebele (of Zimbabwe) and southern Ndebele (of South Africa).

Chaga (1.5 million speakers)

Chaga is spoken in northern Tanzania, around Moshi and on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. Chaga is primarily an ethnic term referring to a group of people, the Wachaga, who are the third-largest ethnic group of Tanzania. Chaga, or Kichaga, is really a dialect continuum, including dialects such as Machame, Vunjo, Rwa, Rombo, Mochi, and Kahe, which show considerable differences and are sometimes regarded as individual languages rather than dialects. Wachaga communities are often seen as economically successful (historically based on coffee and banana farming) and well educated, but due to the dominant role of Swahili as a national language of Tanzania, Kichaga is restricted to mainly local use.

Tonga (1.4 million speakers)

Tonga is a Bantu language spoken mainly in southern Zambia but also in northern Zimbabwe and in Malawi. In Zambia the Tonga are divided into valley Tonga who live on the shores of the Zambezi river and the Kariba dam, and the plateau Tonga who are farmers living on the southern plateau of Zambia, making two distinct but intelligible dialects. Tonga is one of the national languages of Zambia and schooling is conducted in Tonga in the southern province. In Zimbabwe it is spoken in parts of Matebeleland. Tonga is an important lingua franca in the places where it is spoken with speakers from other ethnic groups, particularly the Toka, Ila, and Leya.

Tumbuka (1.4 million speakers)

Tumbuka (or Chitumbuka) is a cross-border language spoken in northern Malawi (1 million speakers) and in the northeast of Zambia's eastern province (0.4 million speakers). During the reign of Kamuzu Banda (c.1896-1997) in Malawi, Chichewa was the only language promoted and used in public discourse, but after Bakili Muluzi became president in 1994 Malawi's language policy was liberalized, and Tumbuka is now found in the media and is receiving some national recognition. In Zambia, Tumbuka is spoken in the eastern province, although the main language is Nyanja. Tumbuka and Nyanja are both Bantu languages and are closely related.

Wambo (1.4 million speakers)

Wambo, or Oshiwambo, is the name for a group of closely related varieties spoken in northern Namibia and southern Angola. These include Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Oshikolonkadhi, Oshimbalantu, Oshikwaluudhi, Oshingandjera, and Oshikwambi. As with other African linguistic issues, the question of language versus dialect for Oshiwambo is not easy to answer. All Oshiwambo "dialects" are mutually intelligible, although there is variation, for example, in pronunciation. The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation seems to treat Oshiwambo as one language, with daily ten-hour broadcasts. On the other hand, there is no standard orthography for Oshiwambo, whereas Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga have (different) standard written forms and are taught as subjects in schools.

Makonde (1.37 million speakers)

Makonde is a central Bantu language spoken in southeastern Tanzania and northern Mozambique. Makonde is closely related to Yao, mainly spoken in southern Malawi but also in Tanzania. Many Makonde speakers also speak Swahili and Makua. There is only limited information on Makonde but more recently a grammar of the language has been written (Peter Kraal, 2005) (A grammar of Makonde. PhD thesis, University of Leiden). The Makonde are a matrilineal society and are master woodcarvers known throughout East Africa. The revolution which drove the Portuguese out of Mozambique in the 1960s was launched from the Makonde homeland of the Mueda Plateau.

Meru (1.3 million speakers)

Meru is a Bantu language spoken around the slopes of Mount Kenya and on the Nyambene ranges in the eastern province of Kenya. There are at least eight distinct clans and dialects of Meru, including Igembe, Imenti, Tharaka, Igoji, Mwimbi, Muthambi, and Chuka. This dialect split is probably due to centuries of migrations from the north. With Swahili and English as the official languages of Kenya used in the entire education system and Swahili as the dominant lingua franca, Meru has more of a local-language status and Meru speakers use Swahili to communicate with other tribes.

Nyamwezi (1.2 million speakers)

Nyamwezi is a Bantu language of northwestern Tanzania. The Nyamwezi are the second-largest ethnic group after the Sukuma. Nyamwezi is a word of Swahili origin that translates as “people of the moon,” a name given to the Nyamwezi by the coastal people to indicate that they came from the west. The Nyamwezi are believed to have settled in their current location in the 1600s. Nyamwezi speakers are usually bilingual with Swahili, the national language of Tanzania. Nyamwezi has linguistic similarities with Sukuma, Sumbwa, and Nilamba. One of the most important historical figures for the Nyamwezi is King (*mtemi*) Mirambo, who revolutionized long-distance trading and created a powerful kingdom with an intricate political, economic, and military system in 1870.

Chokwe (1.6 million speakers)

Chokwe is spoken in Angola, southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and the northwestern corner of Zambia. It is a Bantu language in the Chokwe-Luchazi group. The origins of the Chokwe can be traced back to central Angola from the 1600s, as they were one of the clans of the Lunda Empire (c. 1665-1887). They began to move northwards from about 1850 after their breakaway from the empire, and also in search of fertile lands after a serious epidemic and famine. Chokwe is one of the six national languages in Angola enjoying both radio and television air time. The Chokwe have been greatly affected by modern conflicts but continue to practice their traditions of strong belief in ancestral spirits in militarized areas of Angola and the DRC, and in refugee camps in Zambia. The Chokwe are widely renowned for their fine sculptures and art objects.

Zande (1.14 million speakers)

Zande is an Adamwawa-Ubangi tone language that is mainly spoken in northern Democratic Republic of Congo but also in southwestern Sudan and eastern Central African Republic. Its orthography was established at a language conference in 1928. Past materials have not consistently marked vowel quality and nasalization, but present efforts include these as well as tone on the tense particles. Zande is a local first language but its speakers also use Lingala as the local lingua franca. Zande has the less common verb-subject-object word order in addition to the more common subject-verb-object order. There is some literature available in Zande, including a grammar and a dictionary.

Gogo (1 million speakers)

Gogo is a Bantu language of Tanzania spoken in the Dodoma region. Gogo is part of the Gogo group together with Kagulu, Kihehe, Sangu, and Nilamba, with which it shares some features. Gogo is a major language of the Anglican Church of Tanzania whose commune has been based in Dodoma since 1970. There are three main dialects of Gogo: Nyanmbwa (West Gogo), Nyaugogo (Central Gogo), and Tumba (East Gogo). The prominent Tanzanian musician and highly regarded singer Hukwe Ubi Zawose (1938–2003) is believed to have developed his talent singing on the cattle farms of the Gogo where he grew up.

Nyakyusa (1 million speakers)

Nyakyusa is spoken by just over 1 million speakers in southern Tanzania and northern Malawi. The two speaker groups were formerly regarded as distinct groups divided by the Songwe river, owing to the German East Africa rule in Tanzania and the British in Malawi. There is a myth that Nyakyusa origins trace back to a Nubian queen called *Nyanseba* who was abducted by warriors. This is still reflected in the importance of the female lineage to date. Like other Tanzanian languages, Nyakyusa suffers from underdevelopment due to the predominance of Swahili. Most Nyakyusa speakers also speak Swahili.

Sena (1 million speakers)

Sena is a cross-border language spoken on the southeastern border of Malawi and the central provinces of the Zambezi Valley in Mozambique. It is classified as a Bantu language historically situated between the two major centralized kingdoms of the Monomotapa (of Great Zimbabwe) and the Maravi (in today's Malawi), the respective cultures of the Shona and the Nyanja-Chewa. Sena was spoken across Mozambique and Malawi as a result of demarcating the Shire river as their political border. The influence of English and Chichewa on Malawian Sena and of Portuguese on Mozambiquan Sena has made standardization difficult.