

The structure of Bantoid: new evidence and better models

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The subgrouping of the Bantoid languages and their relationship with Bantu has been the subject of a number of proposals over the years, starting with Guthrie's misleading views. These models have been characterised by an almost complete lack of supporting evidence presented in print. In part this was a reflection of the defective nature of the evidence and simple lack of attestation for numerous languages. This is no longer the situation; we have at least significant comparative wordlists for all putative branches of Bantoid and grammatical descriptions of sample languages. The paper puts together this material to present a new 'tree' modeling the relations between the Benue-Congo languages and Bantu, including evidence for all the branches presently recognized. As a by-product, it presents a strong case for questioning the conventional Bantoid/Bantu distinction and indeed suggests that the time may have come to discard 'Bantu' as an analytic category.