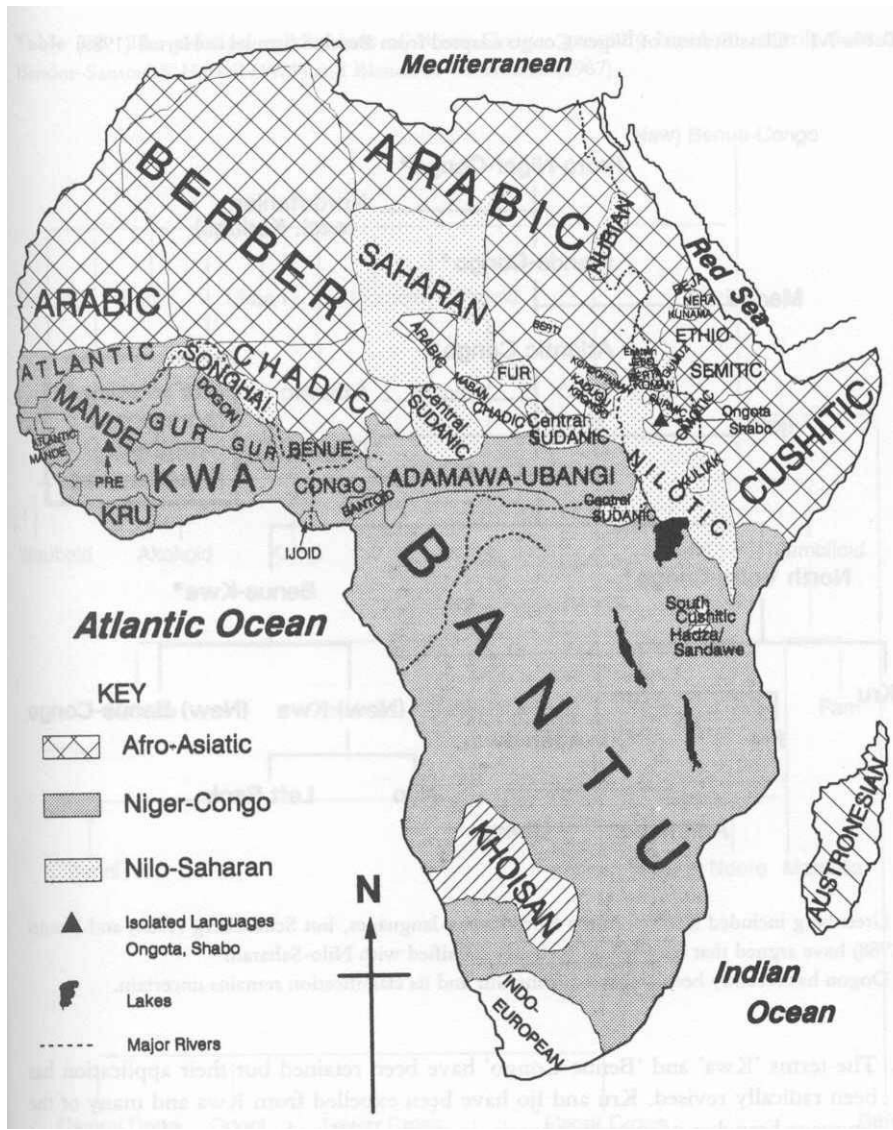


Why are the languages and cultures of the southern half of Africa so similar?

- I. The linguistic map of Africa shows remarkably little linguistic diversity in the southern half of the continent, with vast areas occupied by speakers of Bantu languages.
 - A. The 300-600 Bantu languages are closely related (nobody agrees on how many variants are “languages” instead of “dialects”), and Bantu is but one subgroup within the Benue-Congo group of languages, which are in turn just one part of the Niger-Congo family of languages.
 - B. As you can see from the map, the relatives of Bantu languages are all spoken in western Africa, suggesting that ultimately the Bantu languages spread from that region. **[Can you state the assumption that underlies this suggestion?]**



- C. There is an apparent association of language and subsistence pattern.
1. With very few exceptions, the speakers of Bantu languages are (and have been throughout the historic period) sedentary farmers who grow cereal crops and herd animals, valuing cattle most highly.
 2. Within the Bantu-dominated area there are isolated pockets of people who speak non-Bantu languages (e.g., Hadza, Khoisan), and these people are mostly foragers.
 3. The West African speakers of languages related to Bantu grow mostly root and tree crops, and place much less emphasis on cattle herding.
- II. What caused this uniformity of language and subsistence across such a large area? There are at least three logically possible hypotheses.
- A. “Spread then adopt”: The Bantu languages (and presumably their speakers) spread across the region, then at a later time the cereal-and-cattle agricultural lifeway was adopted by the Bantu speakers.
 - B. “Adopt then spread”: The cereal-and-cattle agricultural lifeway was adopted by speakers of proto-Bantu in their eastern Nigeria/Cameroon “ancestral homeland.” Later the Bantu languages and cereal-cattle agriculture spread south and east, replacing non-Bantu foraging peoples.
 - C. “Adopt while spreading”: The cereal-and-cattle agricultural lifeway was adopted all across the southern half of Africa by non-Bantu groups. Subsequently, this lifeway was maintained when the non-Bantu languages (or people) were replaced by Bantu languages.
- III. **What are the test implications of Hypothesis II.B, “Adopt then spread”?** You should be able to deduce test implications for linguistic phenomena, archaeological data, data from biological anthropology, and information from sociocultural anthropology.

Map source:

Blench, Roger

1993 Recent developments in African language classification and their implications for prehistory. In *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns*, edited by Thurstan Shaw, Paul Sinclair, Bassey Andah, and Alex Okpoko, pp. 126-138. Routledge, New York.