

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Comparative Grammar Reconstruction and Language
Subclassification: The North Victorian Bantu Languages

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Talmy Givón, Chairman

The twin goals of this dissertation are to effect a linguistically based subclassification of the Bantu languages of Eastern Uganda and Western Kenya, and to reconstruct a partial grammar of the immediate proto-language. The languages involved in this study are Ganda and Soga, spoken in Eastern Uganda, and Luyia--four dialects of which are included--and Gusii, spoken in Western Kenya. The four dialects of Luyia are Saamia, Wanga, Bukusu and Logooli.

The original hypotheses underlying the research were that Ganda, Soga and Luyia would constitute a genetic subgrouping, to be called North Victorian Bantu. The status of Logooli, widely agreed to be related to Gusii rather than to Luyia, was approached with an open mind. It was

also thought that, due to the great similarities and prolonged social contact among these languages, the Comparative Method might not be very useful for subgrouping because of the likelihood of borrowing and areal change. It was felt that morphological and syntactic criteria might prove more helpful.

Chapter 1 is a brief summary of major relevant literature on the area, both linguistic and historical, focusing on points of disagreement concerning subclassification and directions of migrations.

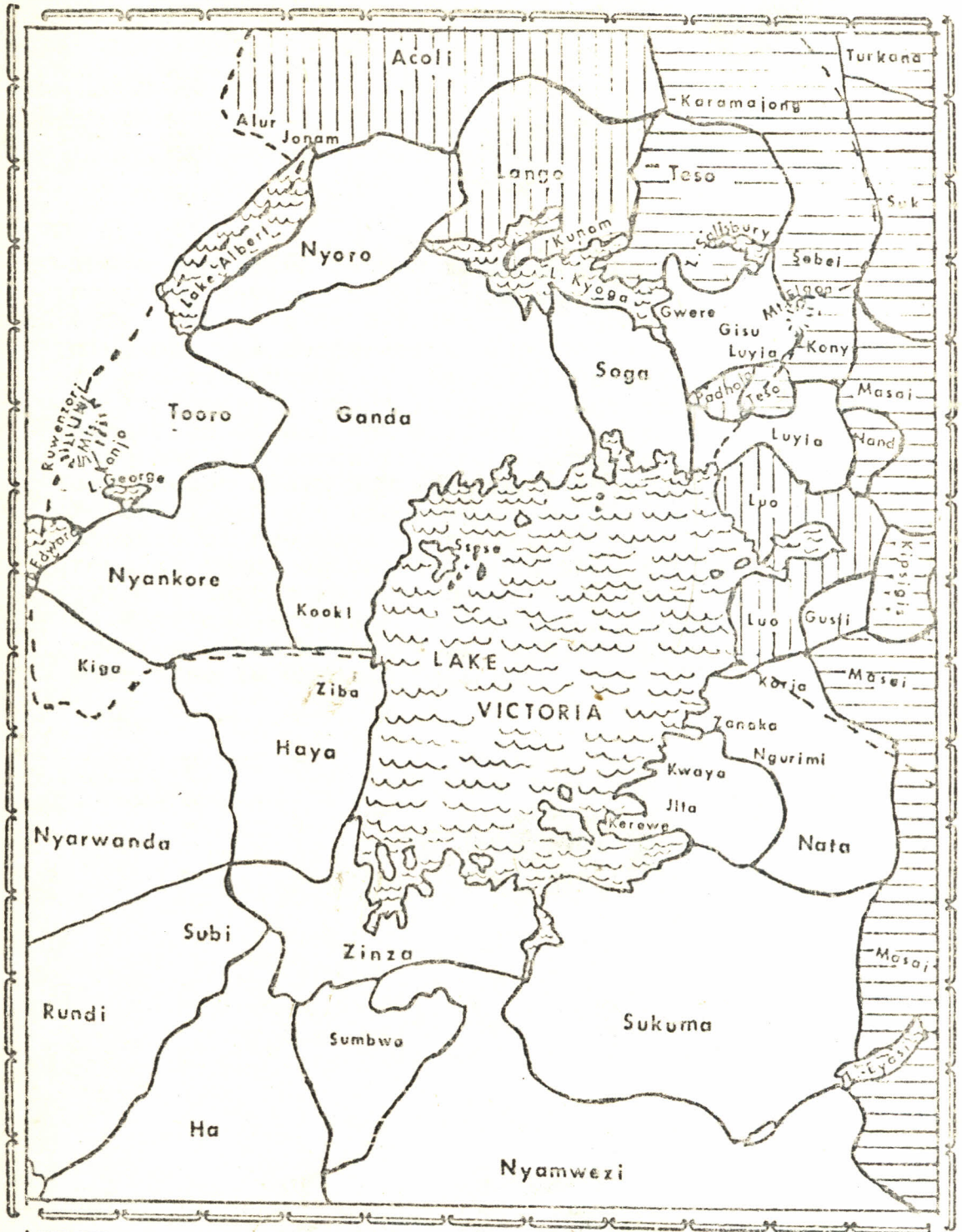
Chapter 2 is a lexicostatistical study. A tentative subgrouping is proposed which indicates that Logooli is a dialect of Luyia. The cognate percentages are then compared with those of Ehret (1973). Ehret's subgrouping of East and West Lacustrine Bantu languages is then combined with those of the present study. It is concluded that Luyia is part of East Lacustrine, but that Ganda and Soga are still closer to other languages such as Nyoro and Haya; therefore North Victorian Bantu is not a valid subgroup. It is also suggested that Gusii is probably more closely related to West Lacustrine and Central Kenyan languages, and, further, that whereas the Baluyia arrived in Western Kenya via Uganda, the Bagusii most likely arrived there from the south, via Tanzania.

Chapter 3 is an examination of sound change. Section 3.1 deals mainly with the phonological history of Luyia.

Few sound changes are found to be helpful for genetic purposes, since most were areal, but those that are evidently shared innovations support the subgrouping suggested in Chapter 1. Section 3.2 reconstructs the development of consonant gemination in Ganda.

Chapter 4 is a comparative study of morphology. In section 4.1 is a discussion of noun phrase morphemes--demonstratives, augmentative and diminutive noun class prefixes, and pronouns. In section 4.2 are presented the independent tense markers of verbs. The chapter focuses mainly on reconstruction of proto-morphemes, but a few morphemes, especially some of the tense markers, are seen to be shared innovations and add weight to the already proposed subclassification.

Chapter 5 is a presentation of several aspects of syntax--gender agreement in conjunction-reduction, demonstrative agreement in gapped constructions, and the function of the noun pre-prefix. The discussion attempts to provide a methodology for syntactic reconstruction as well as some insights into the nature and causes of syntactic changes. It is found that, with the aspects of syntax examined, there is little to support the hypothesis that syntactic criteria are very helpful for subgrouping. It is suggested, however, that the difficulty may be due as much to the close relatedness of these languages and to the rules and conditions examined, as to the nature of syntactic change itself.



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|---|-------------------|---|----------------------------|
|  | Bantu |  | Modern national boundaries |
|  | E. Nilotic |  | Major tribal boundaries |
|  | S. Nilotic (Lwoo) | | |

The comparative method remains today the most powerful device for elucidating linguistic history. When it is carried to a successful conclusion, the comparative method leads not merely to the assumption of the previous existence of an antecedent common language, but to a reconstruction of all the salient features of that language. A reconstructed grammar and dictionary cannot claim any sort of completeness, to be sure, and the reconstruction may be changed because of new data or better analysis. But it remains true, as one distinguished scholar has put it, that a reconstructed protolanguage is "a glorious artifact, one which is far more precious than anything an archaeologist can ever hope to unearth."

Calvert Watkins
The American Heritage
Dictionary of the English
Language, Houghton-Mifflin
Co., 1969, New York