

Renewing Bantu Lexical Reconstruction

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In the wake of Meinhof's *Ur-Bantu* (1899), lexical reconstruction has had a long Bantu tradition (Schadeberg 2002; Bostoen & Bastin 2016; Bostoen 2019). Through the 'Words and Things' method (Ricquier 2017), it has also served African history with contributions of both historians and linguists.

A crowning achievement of more than a century of research in this field is *Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3* (BLR3) (Bastin *et al.* 2002). This online database containing almost 10,000 Bantu lexical reconstructions is up until now the most recent and exhaustive reference tool, despite being more than two decades old and in urgent need of modernization (Bostoen & Bastin 2016; Bostoen 2019).

Renewing historical-comparative linguistic research and data management and accessibility in the domain of Bantu lexical reconstruction may focus, among others, on following axes:

1. Making the synchronic comparative evidence underlying Bantu lexical reconstructions openly accessible for scholars worldwide in line and connection with open-access reference databases for African languages such as RefLex (Segerer & Flavier 2011-2022), and for the wider world, e.g., CLICS³ (Rzymiski *et al.* 2020), LexiBank (List *et al.* 2022) and OUTOFPAPUA (Kamholz *et al.* 2024);
2. Integrating comparative lexical data in geographic information systems for geo-linguistic mapping and historical and areal linguistic analyses based on distribution maps, and exploring the possibilities of artificial intelligence for pattern recognition and automating reconstruction;
3. Aligning Bantu lexical reconstructions with recent advances in Bantu internal classification, both family-wide and within specific branches;
4. Promoting compatibility with regional reconstructions in intermediate ancestor languages that match evolving phonological and morphological paradigms;
5. Implementing new insights from research in diachronic semantics and cross-linguistic colexification patterns in Bantu (e.g., Bastin 1985; Schadeberg 2002; Maniacky 2005; Fleisch 2008; Bostoen 2009) and other languages of the world (e.g., Wilkins 1996; Traugott & Dasher 2002; Kronenfeld & Rundblad 2003; Urban 2015)
6. Improving our understanding of the onomasiology (i.e., different (evolving) names for a given concept from Old Greek *ónoma* ('name')) and semasiology (i.e., the different (evolving) meanings of a given word form, from Old Greek *séma* ('sign')) of reconstructed Bantu vocabulary, that is lexical innovation beyond semantic change through lexical creation processes such as derivation and composition (Zgusta 1990; Geeraerts 1997; Grzegza 2002; Blank 2003).

To foster community engagement in the field of Bantu lexical reconstruction and in preparation of future projects, we invite contributors to address one of the above topics or other relevant subjects for Bantu in general or for specific language groups.

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