

9. CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGES - B) THE NIGER-CONGO FAMILY

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- Most prominent language family of sub-Saharan Africa: up to almost 1,500 separate languages distinguished.
- A hypothetical common 'proto-Niger-Congo' ancestor thought to have ceased to exist 5,000 years ago.
- Exact hierarchical subdivision still under debate.
- The largest of the sub-families is made up by the **Bantu** languages, native to Central and the largest part of Southern Africa.



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Most spoken languages:

- **Swahili** (5 M first language speakers in the East African countries, plus 30 million using it as a second language lingua franca)
- **Yoruba** (20 M) in Nigeria and the eastern part of West Africa; Igbo (17 M) of Nigeria
- **Fulani** (13 M, including second language speakers) in West Africa
- **Wolof** (2.7 M in Senegal, plus 7 million second language speakers)
- **Zulu** (9.5 M) of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique
- **Rwanda** (9.5 M) of Rwanda and adjacent countries

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