

UP NEXT...

LINGUISTICS AND THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE ORIGINS

□ The take of linguistics on the origins of language can be understood in the context of **comparative linguistics.**

❑ **Comparative linguistics** is a branch of linguistics concerned with establishing language families and the reconstruction of prehistoric languages using the comparative method.

□ The **comparative method** involves establishing if two or more languages (e.g. Chewa and Ila) come from the same ancestor language is by comparing words that are related in form (structure) and meaning (semantics) to similar words in another language (e.g. **muntu** - 'person' [Nyanja] and **munu** 'person' [Mbunda]). Such words are called **cognates**.

□ By comparing cognates, we can attempt to reconstruct a **proto-language** from which our languages emerged from.

□ By definition, a **Proto - language** is the hypothetical mother language (ancestral language) from which the compared languages are believed to have come from.

For example:

a). Proto-Bantu is the hypothetical mother language from which all Bantu languages are believed to come from;

b). Proto-Romance (from which Spanish, French etc come from);

- **Proto-Germanic** (from which English and Dutch descend);
- **Proto-Indo-European** (from which most languages of Europe and most of those found in India, Pakistan and Iran come from).

- ❖ On the other hand, languages that descend from a common ancestral language, their so-called proto-language, are called **sister languages** or **cognate languages**. For example, Kaonde and Lamba are sister languages because they are both Bantu languages whose ancestral mother tongue is **Proto-Bantu**. Therefore, every language in a language family that descends from the same language family as the others is a **sister** to them.

□ Lastly, although the comparative method has been used in linguistics to trace the origins of languages, **there is still insufficient evidence** since all comparative methods only date back to only 10000 years or less.



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