

**MACKEY'S GRAMMAR
OF THE BENGA-BANTU
LANGUAGE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649457861

Mackey's Grammar of the Benga-Bantu Language by R. H. Nassau

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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REVISED BY

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GABOON AND CORISCO MISSION,
WEST AFRICA.

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

150 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK.

1892.

S. H.

P R E F A C E .

RECOGNIZING that the task assigned me by the Mission was a revision, and not a new book, I have followed the order of the parts of speech as arranged in Mr. Mackey's Grammar. ("A Grammar of the Benga Language," by Rev. James L. Mackey, New York, 1855.) But on many points I have made additions, enlarging and illustrating it. There are some alterations, but few corrections. The chief additions have been to the Noun and to the Verb: to the latter of which a correction is made in the form taken as typical of the Passive Voice. The effort is made also to have the orthography consistent, by recognizing and calling into use the vocal coalescences so prominent in the Bantu languages.

Acknowledgment is made to Tregelles' "Heads of Hebrew Grammar" for some suggestions and one or two quotations.

But almost all the additions or alterations are from my own notes and suggestions, extending over many years and made at various times in conferences with different native assistants, and from original deductions and inferences in intervals of study.

As giving succinctly the distinguishing features of the Bantu Family, to which the Benga belongs, the following copious extracts are made from Hovelacque, who, in his "Science of Language" ("The Science of Language, Linguistics, Philology, Etymology," by Abel Hovelacque. Translated by A. H. Keane, B. A. London: Clapham & Hall, 193 Piccadilly, 1877. Chap. 4, pp. 44-58 et seq.), arranges all forms of articulate speech into three groups:

A. The Monosyllabic, Isolating Languages, e. g., Chinese.

B. The Agglutinating, or Agglomerative.

C. The Inflective, e. g., Hebrew.

"Of all known languages, those that by their form belong to this second (B) class are by far the most numerous. Beyond all manner of doubt they belong to a great many stocks, very distinct, independent, and incapable of being reduced to a common source. . . . While in the idioms of the first (A) class (Isolating: Chinese, Siamese, etc.) the words are invariably monosyllabic forms, following each other without the least fusion or connection, and each retaining its proper force, in those of the second (B) category, many elements are placed in close association, in a way agglutinating, or agglomerating together, whence their name of "Agglutinating Languages." Of these diverse elements, one alone contains the leading idea, the main thought

or conception, the others losing their independent value altogether. They certainly still retain a personal or individual sense, but this is now entirely relative. . . . In any case, let us state at once that in the agglutinating tongues there is no true declension or conjugation; the use of these terms, as well as of the corresponding words *case*, *nominative*, *accusative*, *genitive*, and so on, . . . is merely a conventional way of expressing oneself, not perhaps to be absolutely condemned, but yet to be taken with great reserve. . . .

"Section 1 of the Agglutinating languages is the *South African*. (By 'South African,' as here used, is understood the languages of the Hottentots and of the Bushmen only.) Subdivisions: (1) Hottentot; (2) Bushmen.

"Section 2. *Languages of the African Negroes*: (1) Woloff, Senegal; (2) Mandingo Group, Senegambia; (3) Felup Group, Gambia; (4) Sonrai (Southeast of Timbuctoo); (5) Hansa, east of Niger; (6) Bornu, west of Lake Chad; (7) Kru Group, Grebo, Bassa; (8) Ewe Group, Yoruba, Akra.

"Section 3. *The Bantu or Kafir Family*, occupies a wide domain, roughly comprising the whole of the southeast of the continent, reaching southwards to the neighborhood of the Cape, and northwards a little beyond the Equator, where it meets the Ethiopian group of the Hamitic family, and the dialects of the negroes of Guinea, thus spreading

north and south over about one-half of the whole continent.

“About one-fourth of the natives of Africa speak the various dialects of this family. These are very numerous, and are all derived from one common source, which . . . is far from being the case with the languages spoken by the negro tribes in the centre and west of the continent. The mother-tongue of this great family is utterly unknown, but it may possibly yet be restored in all its essential grammatical and lexical features.

“The general name of Kafir, often given to the Bantu family, is purely conventional. The word, which is Arabic and means *infidel*, was at first applied to all the tribes of Southeast Africa, but was gradually limited, until it has now come to be restricted to those stretching from the northeast of Cape Colony to Delagoa Bay. Hence it cannot with propriety be any longer applied to such languages as the Ki-Suaheli, spoken in Zanzibar, or to the Fernandian, in the Gulf of Guinea.

“The term Bantu is in every way preferable. It is the plural of a word meaning *man*; has the sense of men, population, people, and may readily be extended to the language itself.

“The phonetic system of the whole family is one of the richest, nor is it lacking in harmony. As a rule, words are modified, not by suffixing, but by prefixing the various elements of relationship.

"It is divided into three great branches, a Western, a Central, and an Eastern, each of which is again subdivided into a number of minor groups. They are thus classified by Fr. Müller and Hahn:—*Eastern Branch*: languages of the Zanzibar district; languages of the Zambesi; Zulu-Kafir group. *Central Branch*: Sechuana and Tegeza. *Western Branch*: Kongo, Herero, etc....

"On the West or Atlantic coast, we find the Bantu system less prevalent than on the East coast. Northwards it stretches four or five degrees beyond the Equator, thus bordering on the languages of the negroes proper.

"The northern division of this western branch comprises the dialects of *Fernando Po*, *Isubu*, *Benga*, *Mpongwe*, *Dikele*, and *Kongo*, which last is the most important of the group.

"More to the south are the *Bunda* (in Angola), *Benguela*, *Londa*, and *Herero*, about 19 degr. south latitude, and reaching southwards as far as the Hot-tentot-Namaqua dialect....

"The phonetics of the BANTU family call for no particular remark, except that the vowels are liable to contraction, to euphonic suppressions, and to other rather numerous variations, but always in accordance with well-determined principles. In this respect the Kafir idioms are more refined than many other agglutinating tongues, instances occurring in them of true vowel harmony, that is, of the

vowel of one syllable assimilating to that of another in the same word.

“The consonantal system seems somewhat complex, owing to the great number of double consonants, whose first element is a nasal; nt, nd, mp, etc.

“On the other hand, we again meet here with some of the click letters of the Hottentot phonetics. The Kafirs seem to have borrowed them from their Hottentot neighbors, as they occur in those Kafir dialects only that border on the Hottentot domain, as, for instance, in those of the Zulu branch. The farther we proceed from this neighborhood, the less frequent these letters become; hence they do not occur at all in Mpongwe or Benga . . . The number of other consonants is very considerable. They are subject to fixed euphonic laws, and interchange regularly between the various members of the Bantu family, a great many of such coincidences being already well known and determined. (Bleek: ‘A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages.’ London, 1869.) . . . All these languages have this in common, that the word is built up by elements not suffixed, but prefixed to the principal root. Of these prefixes, some denote the singular, others the plural. . . . These various formative prefixes of course differ in the various idioms of the Bantu family, but they all nevertheless derive from older common forms. At some unknown period there