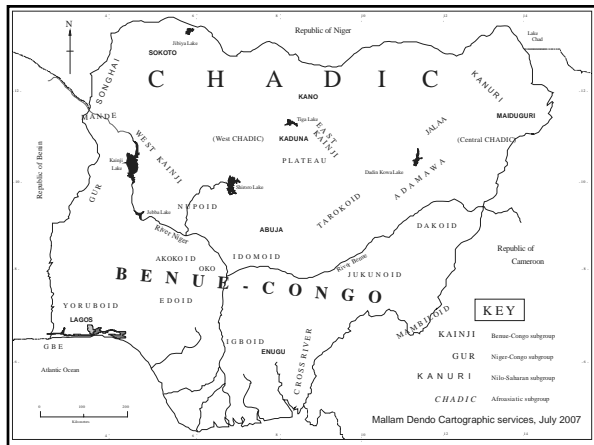
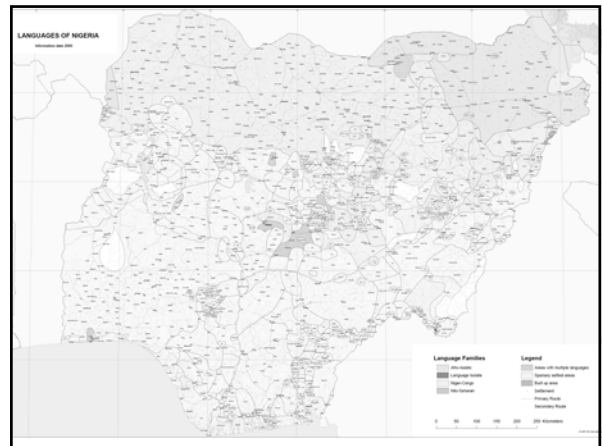


Language Families of the Nigerian Middle Belt and the historical implications of their distribution

Language families of the Nigerian Middle Belt and the historical implications of their distribution

Jos Linguistic Circle
 Jos, July 25th 2007

Roger Blench
 Foundation

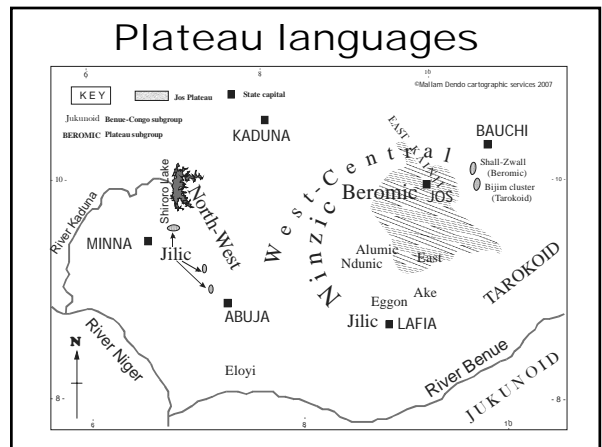


Jalaa

- Nigeria has a single language isolate, the Jalaa or Cen Tuum language spoken among the Cham in the Gombe area.
- Analysis so far suggests that it is unrelated to any other language in the world and thus is probably a survival from the hunting-gathering period when West Africa would have been occupied by small foraging bands speaking a diverse range of now disappeared languages
- Evidence from Mali (Onjougou), Birimi (Ghana) and Shum Laka (Cameroun) puts the settlement of West Africa by modern humans at ca. 40,000 BP
- Other language isolates are Laal (Chad) and Bangi Me (Mali)

Nigeria: meeting place of three of Africa's language phyla

- Nigeria is one of the regions of Africa where three of its four language phyla overlap and interact
- These are;
- Nilo-Saharan (Songhay, Saharan)
- Afroasiatic (Chadic, Semitic, Berber)
- Niger-Congo (Mande, Gur, Atlantic, Volta-Niger, Ijoid, Benue-Congo, Adamawa, Ubangian)
- The Benue-Congo languages (which include Bantu) are the richest and most numerous family, including Plateau, East and West Kainji, Cross River, Dakoid, Mambiloid and other Bantoid, as well as Bantu proper (Jarawan and Ekoid)

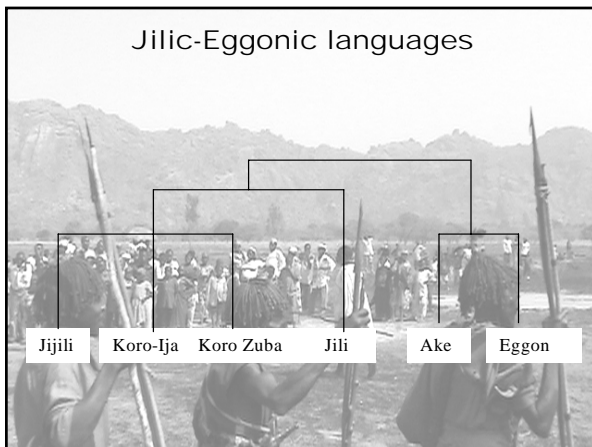
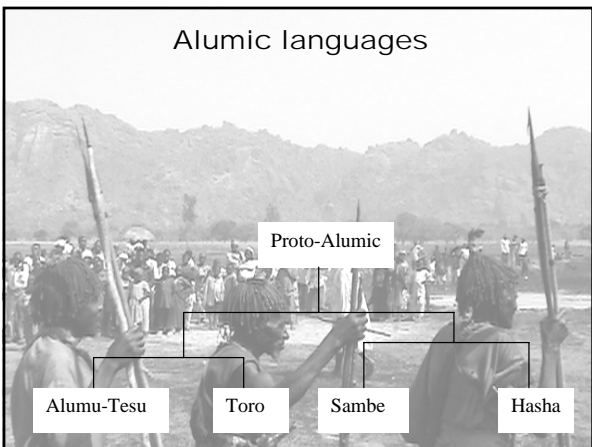
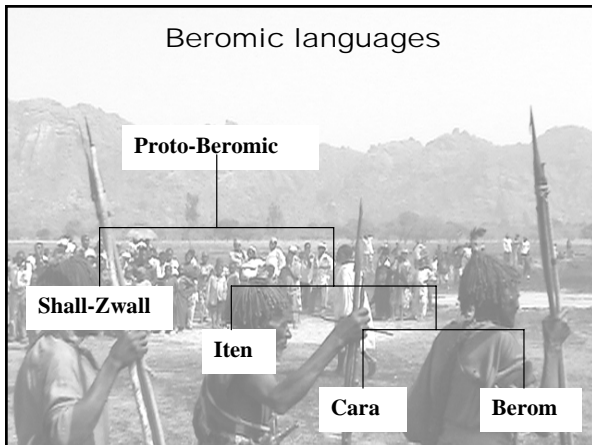
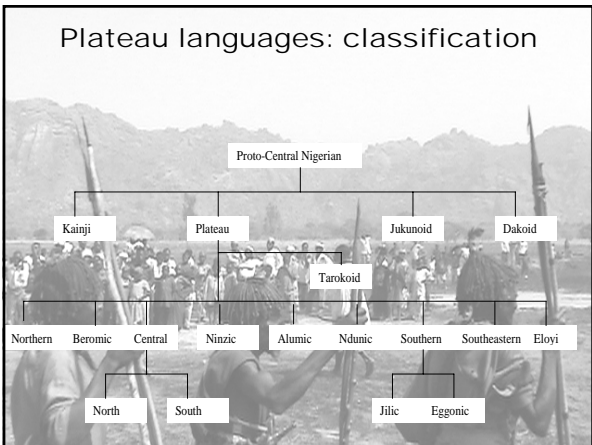


Plateau languages

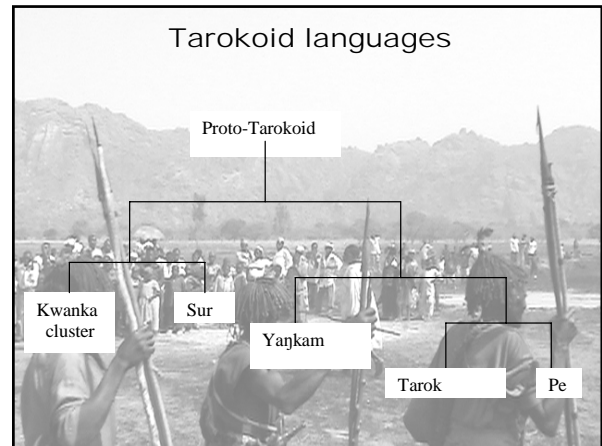
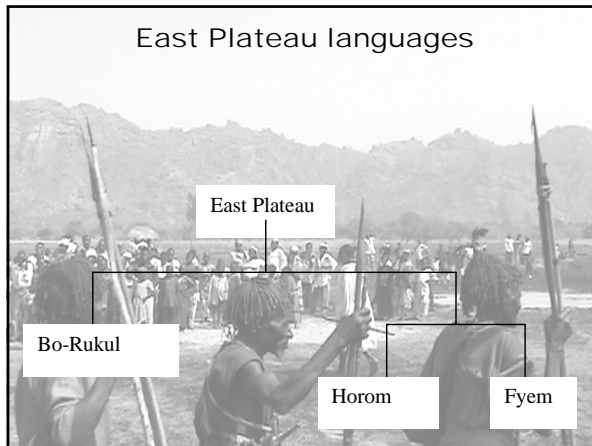
- How many are there?
- Ca. 40 at last count with perhaps 2/3 to be discovered excluding Kainji and Jukunoid
- How many speakers are there?
- Excluding Jukunoid and East Kainji, ca. 1 million. This is largely made up of groups such as Berom and Eggon. Most groups are small (2-10,000). More claim ethnic affiliation in towns but have poor command of the languages

Plateau languages

- What is their status?
- Almost all Plateau languages are threatened, except perhaps Berom and Tarok, and a few are moribund, such as Sambe and Yangkam. The main source of threat is the spread of Hausa and further south, English.
- What classification should be adopted?
- Evidence for a Plateau grouping is present but has never been published
- Relationship with Kainji and Jukunoid still undetermined Membership of Eloyi (previously ascribed to Idomoid) seems likely



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Plateau languages: conclusions I

- Subgrouping at present is nearly all lexical and morphological. I have yet to find any convincing phonological innovations defining groups. Syntax is still poorly known. Language contact is extensive and regular correspondences (as opposed to like/like correspondences) are hard to find
- It is also the case that the affix systems of Plateau and Kainji have eroded and been rebuilt many times; hence the difficulties of finding regular correspondences with for example Bantu noun classes. Verbs and their extensions can be borrowed as a package, hence spurious similarities between Izere and Berom.

East Kainji languages I

- The East Kainji languages were originally identified by Greenberg in 1955 as Plateau 1b. This was ignored by Westermann and Bryan and Rowlands seems to have rediscovered this in 1962, using the wordlists of Meek (1931)
- The idea that Kainji languages were a branch coordinate with Plateau rather than simply a branch seems to have surfaced in the Benue-Congo Working Group as did the informal use of the name Kainji, following the creation of the Lake in 1974. Hoffman's listing in the Index of Nigerian Languages (1976) calls them 'Western Plateau'. But Kainji seems to have only been formally recognised in print by Gerhardt (1989).

East Kainji languages II

- Published evidence for the unity of East Kainji as a group and for its subclassification is non-existent. Scattered wordlists, some very short, are found in the BCCW and in the publications of Shimizu. Since the field trips conducted by Shimizu in the 1970s there have been virtually no new materials published on East Kainji languages.
- John Nengel, made a number of visits to some of these communities in the 1980s to collect historical data but studies of East Kainji languages have largely languished. As a consequence, we began to undertake a survey of East Kainji communities, especially in the Jos area, and focusing on languages reported by Shimizu as severely threatened.
- So far data has been collected on the Boze [=Bujji], Loro, Panawa, Sheni, Tunzu, Ziriya and Zora [=Cokobo] languages. A dictionary project is underway for Boze

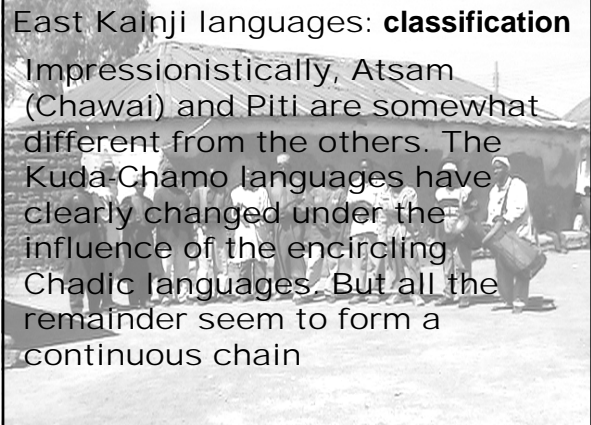
East Kainji languages III

East Kainji languages abut the Hausa-speaking area and their speakers tend to be fluent in Hausa. Many are threatened by the declining competence of the children in their own languages. Ziriya is completely dead, Sheni has just six speakers and Zora is clearly in decline.

It is unlikely the trend will be easily reversed for smaller groups, but larger speech communities such as the Boze, where there is an articulate older generation with an interest in language development, are a more realistic proposition.

East Kainji languages: **classification**

Impressionistically, Atsam (Chawai) and Piti are somewhat different from the others. The Kuda-Chamo languages have clearly changed under the influence of the encircling Chadic languages. But all the remainder seem to form a continuous chain



East Kainji languages

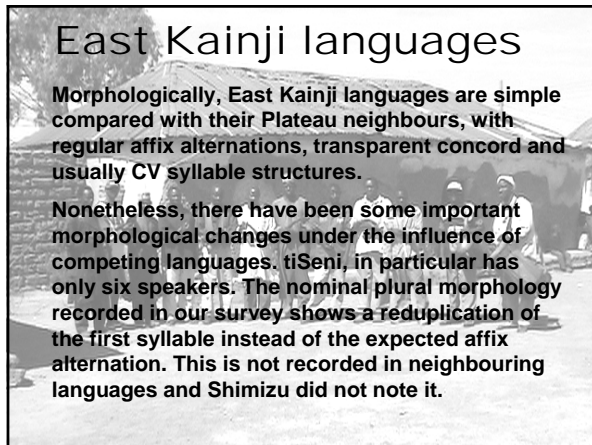
- How many speakers are there?
- No reliable or even unreliable figures available but most groups are very small and language competence declining. Perhaps 100,000 maximum.
- What is their status?
- Almost all East Kainji languages are threatened, except perhaps Amo and Chawai and many reported to exist may well be extinct. The main source of threat is the spread of Hausa. The isolated lects among the Hausa such as Kuda-Chamo are virtually gone. The main source of endangerment is the spread of Hausa and the small size of communities. There is some energy now to protect larger languages like Boze, Tunzu and Amo



East Kainji languages

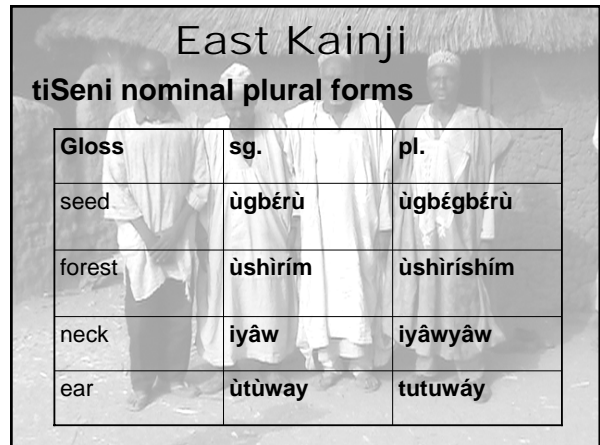
Morphologically, East Kainji languages are simple compared with their Plateau neighbours, with regular affix alternations, transparent concord and usually CV syllable structures.

Nonetheless, there have been some important morphological changes under the influence of competing languages. tiSeni, in particular has only six speakers. The nominal plural morphology recorded in our survey shows a reduplication of the first syllable instead of the expected affix alternation. This is not recorded in neighbouring languages and Shimizu did not note it.




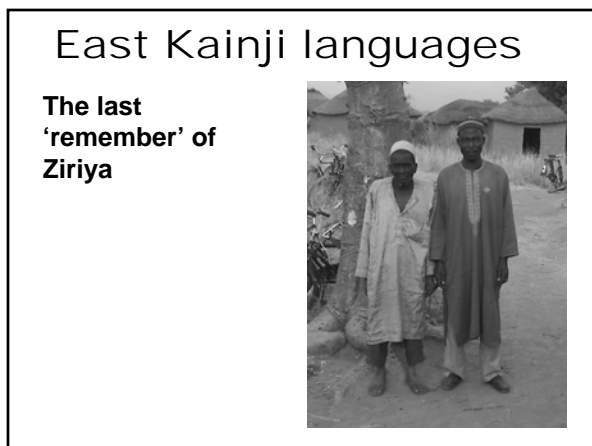
East Kainji
tiSeni nominal plural forms

Gloss	sg.	pl.
seed	ùgbéru	ùgbégbéru
forest	ùshirim	ùshirishim
neck	iyâw	iyâwyâw
ear	ùtúway	tutuwáy



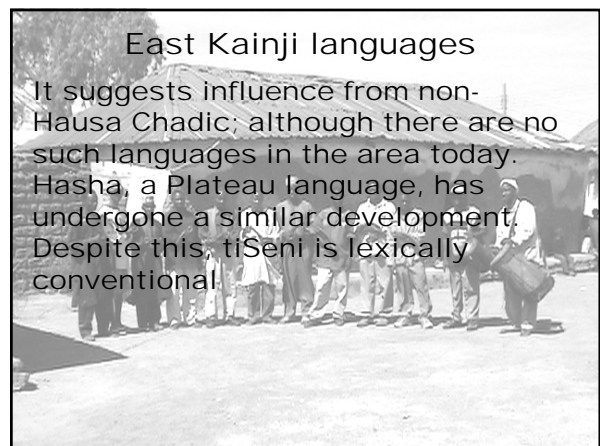
East Kainji languages

The last 'remember' of Ziriya

East Kainji languages

It suggests influence from non-Hausa Chadic; although there are no such languages in the area today. Hasha, a Plateau language, has undergone a similar development. Despite this, tiSeni is lexically conventional.



East Kainji languages

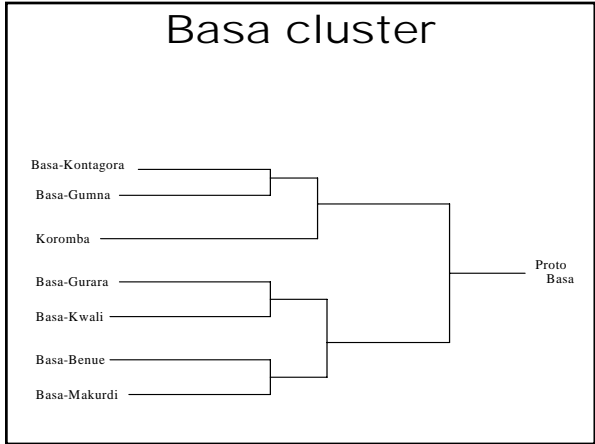
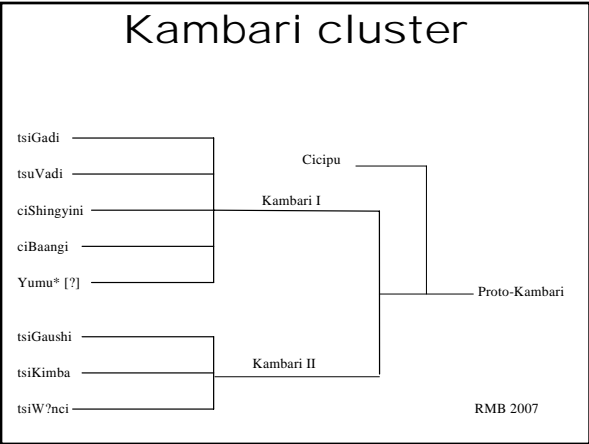
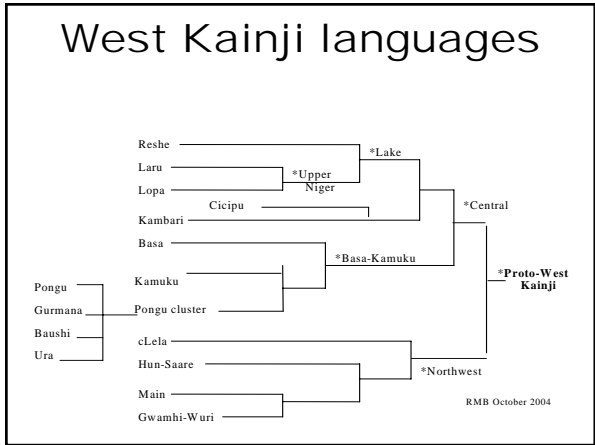
Linguistically, these languages have one very surprising feature, namely four level tones in a region generally marked by three-level systems. The fourth tone has arisen as a superhigh, created by a pluralising tone-raising rule but is in the process of being generalised across the system.

East Kainji languages

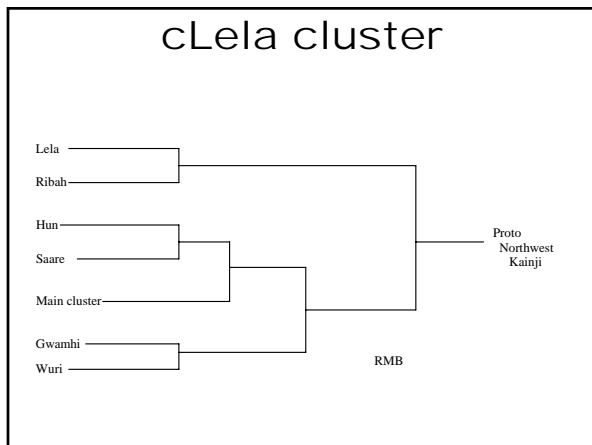
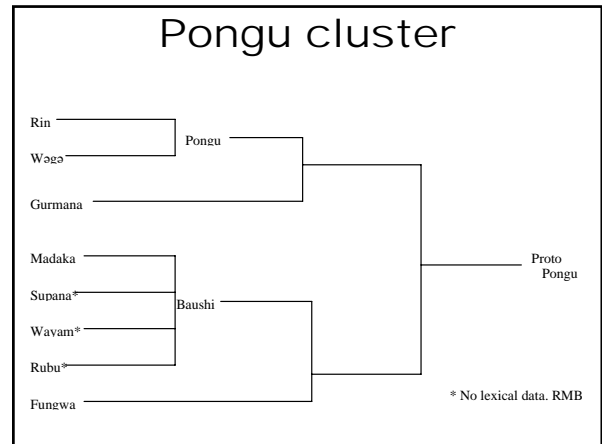
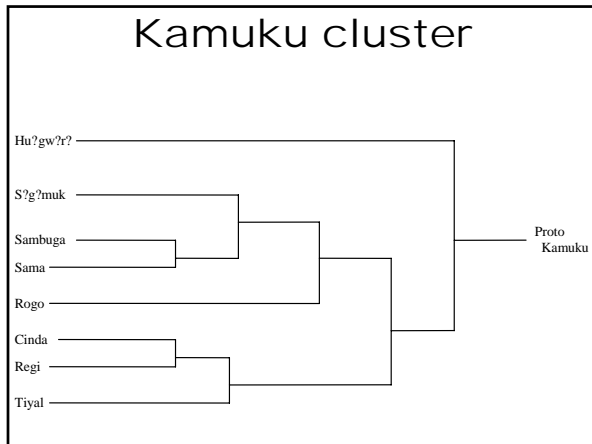
East Kainji languages are all very close to one another, to the extent that they could be regarded as a long dialect chain rather than as distinct languages. Clearly, why this should be so when compared to the highly diverse West Kainji languages is an intriguing problem.

West Kainji languages

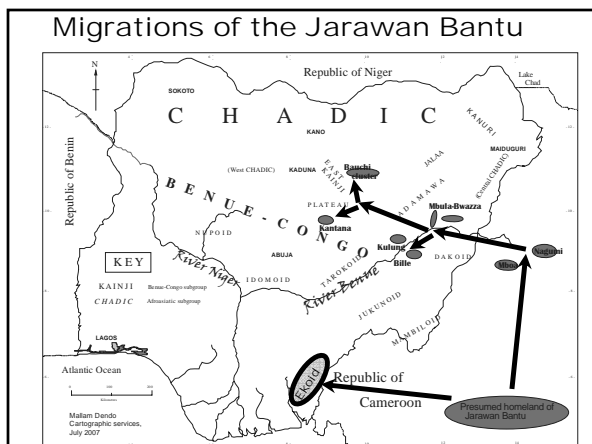
- The West Kainji languages constitute one of the most widespread and typologically diverse groups of Benue-Congo. Some exist for there is still no lexical data.
- They include the Lake languages (Laru, Lopa and Reshe), the Kambari languages, the Lela languages and the Basa chain
- The following trees represent an attempt to order the main subgroups of West Kainji



Language Families of the Nigerian Middle Belt and the historical implications of their distribution

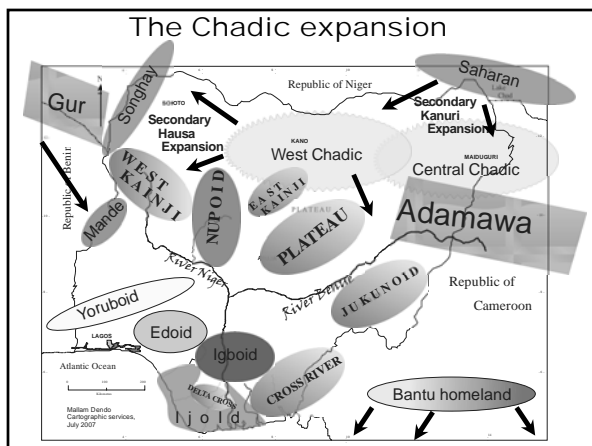
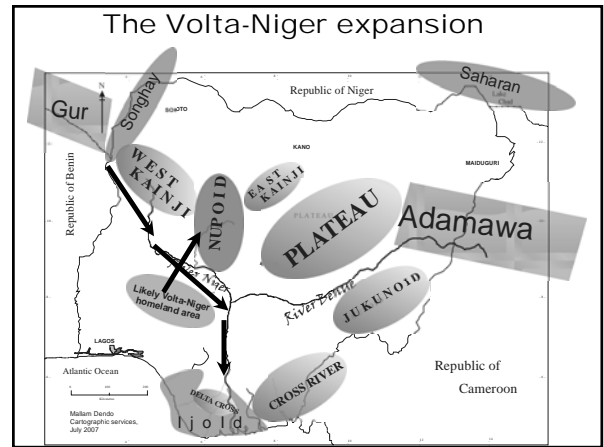
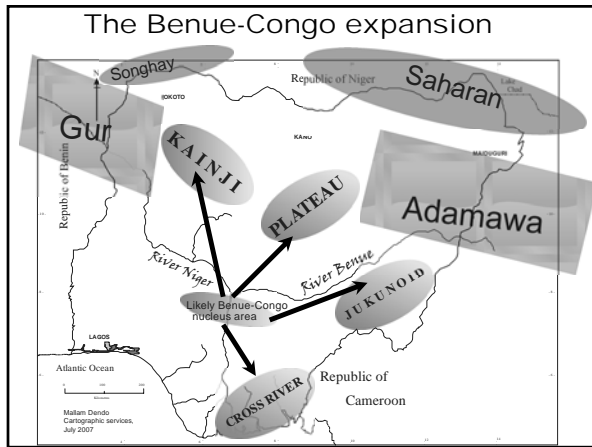
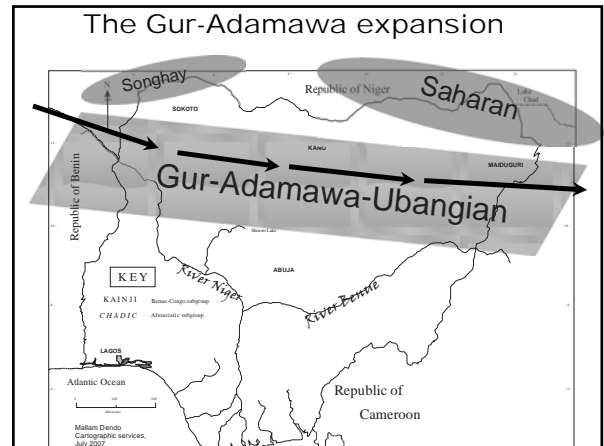
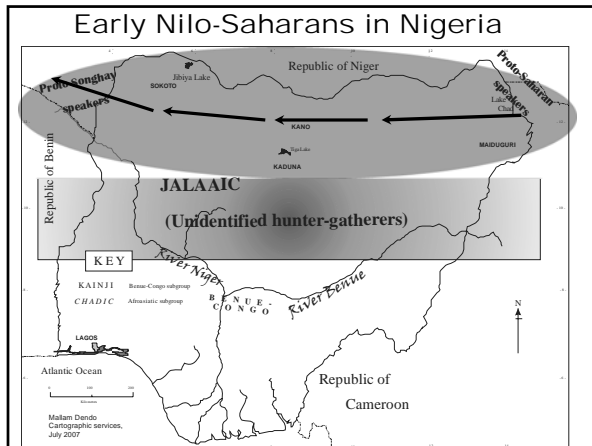


- ### Jarawan Bantu
- The Jarawan Bantu languages form a closely related cluster, stretching from Northern Cameroun, into Adamawa and across into Plateau and Bauchi
 - They are very closely related to Bantu, indeed to the A60 languages and they have only not been treated as Bantu because their nominal prefixes are now 'frozen' possibly due to contact with Chadic.
 - However, on lexical grounds they should be treated as Bantu proper. Their exclusion is typological rather than genetic
 - But of course this does not explain the motivation for their extraordinary migrations..



- ### Historical synthesis I
- The earliest occupation of what is now North-Central Nigeria must have been that of Pleistocene foragers, and perhaps the only trace of these is the Jalaa
 - Nilo-Saharan speakers, probably fishing people, to judge by their harpoon points, expanded across the region ca. 10-8000 years ago
 - This was followed by the Gur-Adamawa speakers, stretching from Burkina Faso to Chad, perhaps 6-8000 years ago
 - It is likely the East Benue-Congo speakers then spread northwards, disrupting the Gur-Adamawa chain
 - Probably then the Nupoid languages expanded northwards and broke apart the two branches of Kainji

Language Families of the Nigerian Middle Belt and the historical implications of their distribution



- ## Historical synthesis II
- This would have been followed by the expansion first of West Chadic (2-3000 years ago) and then the secondary expansion of Hausa (? 1000 years ago) further breaking up the Kainji and Plateau populations and pressing Adamawa languages southwards
 - At the same time there would have been a secondary expansion of Kanuri cluster languages from north of Lake Chad
 - Shuwa Arabs are likely to begin incursions into NE Nigeria in the 13th century
 - And sometime around this period the Jarawan Bantu migrations begin