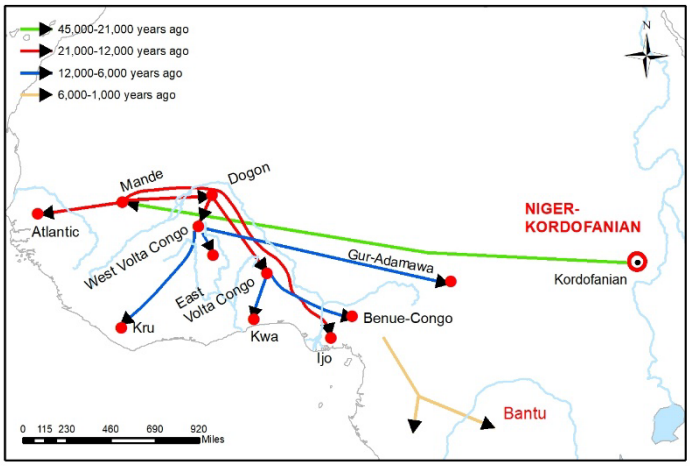
4.Niger–Kordofanian

Homeland. The homeland of Niger–Kordofanian languages is indicated clearly by the Kordofan Hills, where speakers of one branch of the ancestral phylum continue to live.



Concise Spreadsheet: top four levels

Niger–Kordofanian			
	Kordofanian		
		Heiban	
		Talodi	
		Rashad	
		Katla	
	Niger–Congo		
		Mande	
		Atlantic	
		Ijo	
		Dogon	
			West Volta–Congo
			East Volta–Congo

Full Spreadsheet: see "4.Niger-Kordofanian," listing Niger-Kordofanian languages by groups and subgroups.

Pleistocene Changes.

65,000–45,000 years ago. Languages ancestral to the Niger–Kordofanian phylum arose out of the original speaking community, likely within the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

45,000–21,000 years ago. Niger–Kordofanian speakers arose within the Nilo-Saharan phylum, forming the Niger-Kordofanian phylum as of 40,000–50,000 years ago. Early speakers of Niger–Kordofanian may have migrated to West Africa, perhaps unsuccessfully, as earlier occupants maintained their hold on those lands.

21,000–12,000 years ago. After the Last Glacial Maximum, members of the Mande language family within Niger–Kordofanian successfully settled far to the west in the middle Niger Valley. Subsequent separations from Mande languages led to the Atlantic languages, west of Mande along the Atlantic; the Ijo languages, at a distance to the southeast in the lower Niger Valley; followed by Dogon, in hill country of the middle Niger. Migration from Dogon lands led to the formation of West Volta–Congo and East Volta–Congo language families, both at the frontier of savanna and forest ecologies.

Holocene Changes.

12,000–6000 years ago. Mande spread both to the east and west along the savanna. West Volta–Congo divided into Kru (on the West African coast) and Gur–Adamawa, centered in today's Burkina Faso but extending eastward along the savanna, beyond Lake Chad. Settlers then moved south and into forested regions: East Volta–Congo divided into Kwa (from today's Benin to Ivory Coast) and Benue–Congo, in the lower Niger Valley.

6000 years ago–1000 CE. Groups within eastern Benue–Congo expanded south and east to form Bantoid languages; groups within Bantoid, known as Bantu, expanded great distances throughout central, eastern, and southern Africa.

Commentary and Debates. From the nineteenth century, linguists debated the ancestry of Bantu languages, recognized for their similarity across Central, East, and Southern Africa. Joseph Greenberg resolved the main debate in the 1960s, showing that all the languages closest to Bantu were in southwest Cameroon. Yet migrations of Bantu speakers were complex and dispersed across millennia—their details are still being worked out.

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