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Consonant inventories and consonant systems in Eastern Bantu languages:  
complexity patterns, universals and diachrony

Guthrie's reconstruction of Common Bantu posits a consonant system with eight oral plosives and two to four nasals, with no [ $\pm$ continuant] contrast (contrary to Meinhof's system, which had on its part no [ $\pm$ voice] contrast). While this reconstructed system accounts satisfactorily for most correspondences between present-day Bantu languages, it is extremely improbable typologically.

I propose to systematically compare as many of present-day Eastern Bantu consonant systems as possible on the basis of available information. I will examine the diachronic evolution of the postulated proto-phonemes and the way systematic gaps are dealt with. It is expected that the study will contribute not only to a better understanding of the evolution of Eastern Bantu sound inventories, but also to a more general evaluation of the equilibrium of consonant systems in terms of their complexity, following in the lead of Maddieson (1984) among others.

N. B. : I realise that this topic relates only distantly to Niger-Congo comparison, but it's the best I can do, and I submit it only after friendly pressure from my colleague V. Vydrin.