

Nilo-Saharan Peoples

The term “Nilo-Saharan” refers to the approximately 200 languages of African peoples living in the Northern African countries of Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, and Libya.¹ These languages have been classified as being “genetically” connected because of their presumed descent from “a common ancestral language,”² as well as similarities in their linguistic structures.³ Greenberg (1963) has also established that the linguistic structures of the numerous languages take on the features of some of the unrelated neighboring languages.

The great diversity within the individual languages has made the study of this language family somewhat difficult. It is estimated that there are upwards of 50 million people who speak the Nilo-Saharan languages. Of the four language families of Africa, Nilo-Saharan is the smallest, having the lowest number of speakers, and is mainly located in northern Africa. The other three groups are: Niger-Kordofanian, spoken across the majority of southern Africa; Afroasiatic, spoken across the Sahara, northeastern, and eastern Africa; and, Khoesan, which comprises the click-consonant languages spoken in southern and eastern Africa.

Current research on African languages has some reference to the Nilo-Saharan languages but usually not in great detail. In searching for information about the Nilo-Saharan languages, it is obvious that there is a need for additional scholarly research of Nilo-Saharan languages on the bases of genetics, linguistics, and cultures. The majority of the literature accessed indicates that the Nilo-Saharan languages have many speculative and unsubstantiated claims regarding its linguistic, cultural, genetic, and other characteristics. The diversity and uncertainties about the Nilo-Saharan languages are what make the study of them so fascinating and curious.

¹ http://i-cias.com/e.o/nilo-saharan_ls.htm.

² Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 2012.

³ Greenberg, 1963.

References

Encyclopædia Britannica. "Nilo-Saharan languages". Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 09 May. 2012
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/415424/Nilo-Saharan-languages>>.

Greenberg, Joseph H. (1963). *The Languages of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Greenberg, Joseph H. (1970). *The Languages of Africa*, 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Looklex Encyclopedia, (http://i-cias.com/e.o/nilo-saharan_ls.htm).