

African Historical Linguistics (A005309)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

null

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Goes, Heidi	LW21	staff member
Bostoen, Koen	LW21	lecturer-in-charge
Gunnink, Hilde	LW21	co-lecturer
Kerr, Elisabeth	LW21	co-lecturer
Pacchiarotti, Sara	LW21	co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

null

Teaching languages

English, Dutch

Keywords

Historical-comparative linguistics, African languages, Bantu, language and history in Africa, interdisciplinarity

Position of the course

This course aims at introducing students to the fundamentals of historical-comparative linguistics and her principal methods by means of examples from African languages, especially Bantu languages. It is also explained how historical-comparative linguistics can be used for the reconstruction of precolonial African history.

Contents

1. Words as history
2. How to explain similarities between languages
3. Sound change
4. Morphological and syntactic change
5. Historical language classification
6. Quantitative approaches to language evolution
7. Lexical and grammatical reconstruction
8. Semantic change
9. Language contact

Initial competences

This course builds upon the linguistic knowledge students have already acquired through the African Languages and Cultures program. It also puts the program's two languages, i.e. Lingala and Swahili, in a wider historical and comparative perspective. Having followed the courses 'Introduction to African Linguistics' and "Language Documentation and Description in Africa" is recommendable, but not a prerequisite. This course can also be followed by students having another linguistic training.

Final competences

- 1 Having insight in African linguistics;
- 2 Having an understanding of the interaction between language, culture and society in Africa and the Diaspora;

- 3 Acquiring the capacity of critically and creatively reflecting on the multidisciplinary nature of the Africa study
- 4 Being able to gather and critically analyse sources and studies on African languages, literatures, history and cultures
- 5 Thinking critically and having academic independence in acquiring knowledge about Africa and the African diaspora
- 6 Testifying to an attitude of intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning
- 7 Knowing how previously acquired linguistic knowledge can be applied in a comparative way to better understand historical relationships among African languages
- 8 Having an understanding of how historical-comparative linguistic research can contribute to a better understanding of Africa's history

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: Historical Linguistics and the Comparative Study of African Languages
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no
 Language : English
 Author : Gerrit Dimmendaal
 Alternative : <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unigent-ebooks/detail.action?docID=711404>
 Online Available : Yes
 Available in the Library : Yes
 Available through Student Association : Yes
 Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : intensive
 Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : one-time
 Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : occasionally

Type: Slides

Name: African Historical Linguistics
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no

References

Campbell, Lyle. 2004. Historical Linguistics: An Introduction (second edition). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Crowley, Terry and Claire Bowern. 2010. An Introduction to Historical Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dimmendaal, Gerrit. 2011. Historical Linguistics and the Comparative Study of African Languages. Amsterdam: John Benjamins

Vansina, Jan. 1990. Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Vansina, J. 2004. How societies are born: governance in West Central Africa before 1600. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Course content-related study coaching

Assessment moments

end-of-term assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Extra information on the examination methods

Given that this class is not taught in 2026-2027 students who took it in 2025-2026 and did not succeed can request the titular for an alternative task which will replace the written exam.

Calculation of the examination mark

Written exam

Facilities for Working Students

1. Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance.
2. Possible rescheduling of the examination to a different time in the same academic year
3. Feedback can be given by email, telephone or during an appointment during or after office hours

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy