GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2026-2027

Comparative Bantu Grammar (A005573)

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

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2027-2028

A (semester 2)	English	Gent
B (semester 2)	English	Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2027-2028

Kerr, Elisabeth	LW21	lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2027-2028	**crdts**	**offering**
Master of Science in Teaching in Languages(main subject African Languages and Cultures)	5	A
Virtual Mobility	5	B
Master of Arts in African Studies	5	A
Exchange Programme African Languages and Cultures	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Bantu grammar; comparative grammar of African languages; linguistic typology; areal linguistics; morphology; phonology; syntax, semantics, information structure; Niger-Congo; African languages

Position of the course

This is an advanced course on the grammar of the Bantu languages of Africa. The course provides students with knowledge of key grammatical aspects of Bantu languages, which are situated in a comparative and typological perspective through comparison with other languages from within and outside Africa.

Contents

Bantu languages are the predominant language family of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, with an estimated 1 in 3 Africans speaking a Bantu language. The large geographical region in which Bantu languages are spoken combined with the large number of closely-related languages (approx. 555) furthermore provides excellent insight in how languages differ and how languages change over time. This has led to a large amount of research on Bantu languages, in turn influencing general linguistics and related fields.

This course covers key topics of Bantu grammar, contextualising the study of Bantu languages within the history of science. The grammatical domains that will be covered include but are not limited to: noun class systems and their agreement patterns, verbal inflectional categories (e.g. tense, aspect, mood, modality), phonology and the phonology/syntax interface, verbal syntax and semantics, and information structure. Students will familiarise themselves with key developments in Bantu linguistics and develop their own research skills through regularly reading state-of-the-art literature and discussing it with peers in class. Through the contrastive study of languages belonging to distinct subgroups of the Niger-Congo phylum, other phyla within the African continent (Nilo-Saharan, Afroasiatic, "Khoisan", Austronesian), and other language families, students will be able to situate what they learn about grammatical features of Bantu languages within a broader typological context.

The course is structured around weekly readings – each week, students will be asked to read one or more journal articles or book chapters as preparation. The contents of these chapters will be discussed and built upon collectively during class. Each student will be required to present one research article/chapter of their choice from a list provided in advance. Students will also choose a research paper topic on a feature of their own interest, which will be submitted as the final assignment.

Prior knowledge of basic linguistic terminology and concepts is assumed. While knowledge of Bantu languages or other African languages is useful, it is not a prerequisite to follow this course.

Initial competences

Bachelor in African languages and cultures, Bachelor in Linguistics or equivalent.

Final competences

An advanced knowledge and understanding of Bantu language structures and their typological diversity.

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

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Independent work, Peer teaching

Extra information on the teaching methods

No recordings of class will be made.

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: The Oxford Guide to the Bantu Languages
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Author : Lutz Marten (ed.), Ellen Hurst-Harosh (ed.), Nancy C. Kula (ed.), Jochen Zeller (ed.)
ISBN : 978-0-19880-834-3
Number of Pages : 1264
Online Available : Yes
Available in the Library : Yes
Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : regularly

Type: Handbook

Name: The Bantu Languages (2nd edition)
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Author : Mark Van de Velde (ed.), Koen Bostoen (ed.), Derek Nurse (ed.), Gérard Philippson (ed.)
ISBN : 978-1-03240-166-9
Number of Pages : 806
Online Available : Yes
Available in the Library : Yes
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : regularly

References

The course will use selected chapters from the compulsory materials, in addition to providing extra articles.

Course content-related study coaching

Feedback in class; drop-in office hours (spreekuur).

Assessment moments

continuous assessment

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

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

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Calculation of the examination mark

20% participation (class participation, advance reading of provided literature)
30% oral presentation (presentation of journal article/book chapter, research paper proposal)
50% final assignment (research paper in which the student will further explore and elaborate on a topic of choice for one or more Bantu languages (7,000-10,000 words, excluding bibliography, language data, and appendix))

Facilities for Working Students

Yes.