

## 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

**crdts                      offering**

**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**

Since this course will not be offered in the 2026–2027 academic year, students who took it in 2025–2026 and did not pass may, upon request to the instructor, access the lecture recordings from 2025–2026 and retake the written exam by appointment.

**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 or check <https://www.ugent.be/lw/en/degree/fsa/workingandstudying.htm>