

## African Historical Linguistics (A005309)

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

**Credits 5.0**

**Study time 150 h**

**Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2023-2024**

A (semester 2)

Dutch, English

Gent

seminar

independent work

lecture

**Lecturers in academic year 2023-2024**

Goes, Heidi

LW21

staff member

Maselli, Lorenzo

LW21

staff member

Pacchiarotti, Sara

LW21

lecturer-in-charge

Bostoen, Koen

LW21

co-lecturer

de Schryver, Gilles-Maurice

LW21

co-lecturer

Gunnink, Hilde

LW21

co-lecturer

**Offered in the following programmes in 2023-2024**

[Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures\(main subject Arabic and Islamic Studies\)](#)

**crdts**

5

**offering**

A

[Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures\(main subject China \(China Track\)\)](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures\(main subject China \(UGent Track\)\)](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures\(main subject India\)](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures\(main subject Japan\)](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in African Languages and Cultures](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in History](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in Moral Sciences](#)

5

A

[Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy](#)

5

A

[Exchange Programme African Languages and Cultures](#)

5

A

[Linking Course Master of Arts in African Studies](#)

5

A

[Preparatory Course Master of Arts in African Studies](#)

5

A

**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 The course wants to teach students how they can compare African languages without a long written tradition to acquire a better understanding of their historical development
- 8 Students learn how to apply their linguistic knowledge already acquired in a comparative and historical way
- 9 The course also wants to show students how linguistic research of this kind can contribute to a better knowledge of the precolonial history of Africa

### **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

### **Learning materials and price**

The manual for this course is Dimmendaal, Gerrit. 2011. Historical Linguistics and the Comparative Study of African Languages. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. It can be purchased for about 35 EUR and will be completed with handouts and ppt's of the lecturer.

### **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 2020-2021 students who took it in 2019-2020 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