

Language Variation and Change (A006630)

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

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2) English Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Breitbarth, Anne LW06 lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	crdts	offering
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Historical Perspectives)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Linguistics)	5	A
Master of Arts in Historical Linguistics and Literature	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

variational linguistics, language change

Position of the course

The course aims at providing students with a sound understanding of:

- the relation between language variation and the language system, with examples taken from different languages.
- language variation as a mirror of language change.
- theories, models and methods concerning the analysis of spatial and social variation and diachronic change.

Contents

This course deals with language variation and change with particular focus on syntactic variation and change. It consists of two larger components: a theoretical part which is mainly organised around discussing seminal literature on language variation and change, and an empirical research project studying a chosen syntactic change with the help of a parsed corpus (for selected languages; possible choices a.o.: English, French, Portuguese, Icelandic, Old and Middle Low German, Chinese). The work with parsed corpora will be taught by means of a tutorial as well as a practical session.

Initial competences

Solid knowledge about diverse linguistic theories taught in the Bachelor programme.

Final competences

- 1 To have a thorough insight into the structure of language variation and language change.
- 2 To be able to apply both theories and methodologies to new research designs.
- 3 Academic writing skills.

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

Extra information on the teaching methods

- independent work/guided independent study: preparation of weekly readings, discussion in class
- guided exercises: working with parsed histopical corpora

Study material

Type: Reader

Name: Articles and tutorial material for the research task

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

Additional information: Any additional material will be provided through Ufora.

References

(for orientation, reading list may change:)

Bermúdez-Otero, Ricardo. 2007. Diachronic phonology. In De Lacy, Paul (ed.) The Cambridge handbook of phonology, 497–517. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Biberauer, Theresa, Michelle Sheehan & Glenda Newton. 2010. Impossible changes and impossible borrowings: the Final-Over-Final Constraint. In Anne Breitbarth, Christopher Lucas, Sheila Watts & David Willis (eds.), Continuity and Change in Grammar, 35–60. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Deo, Ashwini. 2015. Diachronic Semantics. Annual Review of Linguistics 1:179–97. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-linguist-030514-125100>.

Taylor, Anne. 2020. Treebanks in historical syntax. Annual Review of Linguistics 6: 195–212 <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-011619-030515>

Walkden, George & Anne Breitbarth. 2019. Complexity as L2-Difficulty: Implications for Syntactic Change. Theoretical Linguistics 45(3-4): 183–209

Weinreich, Uriel, William Labov & Marvin I. Herzog. 1968. Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change. In Winfred P. Lehmann and Yakov Malkiel (eds.), Directions for Historical Linguistics, 95–195. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Yang, Charles. 2000. Internal and external forces in language change. Language Variation and Change 12: 231–250.

Course content-related study coaching

Individually, during and after class.

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

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

Paper (report on own research project). A second chance is possible.

Calculation of the examination mark

Paper: 100%

Facilities for Working Students

The student has to report on a set list of literature and has to write a paper.

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy (<https://www.ugent.be>).

