

# The Languages of Africa

LIN 4930/6932 . SSA 4930 . Fall 2020 . T 7 R 7-8 . Synchronous Online\*

**\*For more details please see the Canvas page for this course**

**This course fulfills the Humanities (H) and International (I) GenEd requirements**

**Instructor:** Dr. Fiona Mc Laughlin

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**Hours:** Wednesdays: 9:30-11:30 and by appointment (may be subject to change)

## Description

There are close to two thousand indigenous languages, or one third of the world's languages, spoken on the African continent, making for an extremely rich and complex linguistic environment befitting of the continent where humanity originated. This course is intended as an introduction to the four main language families of Africa, and will present an overview of their component sub-groups, their history and geographical distribution, and their characteristic linguistic features, including phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactic features, all the while keeping in mind the role of African languages in their respective societies. You will contribute to the class knowledge of individual African languages by 'adopting' a grammar and presenting information on specific features of your adopted language at appropriate points during the semester. This class will also tell a story of how knowledge about African languages has been produced within a history of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racism. We tend to think of linguistics as a neutral science, but in reality, its theories and descriptions have been deeply influenced by historical currents and Western ideologies of language and race that have had a profound effect on the discipline. Exploring how these influences have affected what we know about African languages will help you to engage in critical thinking about linguistics as a whole, its centrality to the production of knowledge, and its power.

## Objectives

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- identify and define the four African language families, their component sub-families, and geographic distribution
- identify and define the typical and sometimes unique characteristics of African languages
- analyze pertinent data from African languages
- propose, evaluate, and communicate arguments about African languages
- recognize and explain how knowledge about African languages has been produced historically
- identify and define the major contemporary concerns within the field of African linguistics

## Readings

The textbook for this course is:

Heine, Bernd & Derek Nurse, eds. 2000. *African languages: an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Supplemental required readings are available on Canvas, marked by an asterisk on the schedule.

## Assignments

It is your responsibility to do all the readings for this class, complete assigned discussion posts, and come prepared to answer questions about them, discuss them, and ask questions about points that you would like clarification on.

## Grades

<b>Grades will be based on the following work:</b>	<b>%</b>
Discussion posts (1-2 per week)	25
Class presentations on “adopted” language	30 (3 presentations worth 10 points each)
Essay of 2500-3000 words	15
Mid-term take-home exam	15
Final take-home exam	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

The assignment of a final letter grade will be based on the following scale:

A 94-100	B 84-87	C 74-77	D 64-70
A- 90-94	B- 80-84	C- 70-74	D- 61-64
B+ 87-90	C+ 77-80	D+ 67-70	E Below 61

## A note on participation, class involvement, and classroom culture

The virtual classroom is where we will accomplish much of our work this semester and you are expected to be a contributing member of our classroom community. This means that attendance and preparation are of paramount importance. Although you do not earn points simply by attending class, unexcused absences (more than 3 during the semester) or repeated tardiness will result in a lowered grade. You must complete all assignments and readings in a timely fashion, ie: by the beginning of the week for which readings are assigned, and come to class informed and prepared to discuss the topic of the day. Please make sure that your cellphones are turned off before class starts. Mutual respect for class members is expected at all times in order to ensure a positive learning environment for a productive and enjoyable semester.

## Academic honesty

Students are expected to adhere to UF’s honor code at all times. <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

## Students with disabilities

The Disability Resource Center [DRCAccessUF@ufsa.ufl.edu](mailto:DRCAccessUF@ufsa.ufl.edu) helps to provide an accessible learning environment for all by providing support services and facilitating accommodations, which may vary from course to course. Once registered with DRC, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodations. Students should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**Schedule of topics, readings and assignments (may be modified by the instructor to suit the needs of the class) \*Indicates that a reading is available on electronic reserves.**

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS (*on Canvas)	ASSIGNMENTS
<b>AFRICAN LANGUAGES: SETTING THE SCENE</b>			
Tuesday 9/1	Introduction	*Childs. Chapter 1: Introduction.	Discussion post
Thursday 9/3	Language in African society	Heine & Nurse. Chapter 12: Language and society.	Discussion post

AFRICAN LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION			
Tuesday 9/8	Classifying African languages: Colonialism and science	*Judith Irvine. 2008. Subjected words: African linguistics and the colonial encounter. <i>Language and Communication</i> 28(4):323-343.	Discussion post
Thursday 9/10	Classifying African languages: Colonialism and science	*Jan Blommaert. 2008. Artefactual ideologies and the textual production of African languages. <i>Language and Communication</i> 28(4):291-307.	Discussion post
Tuesday 9/15	The comparative method	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 10: Comparative linguistics.	Discussion post
Thursday 9/17	The comparative method	*HANDOUT	Essay due
Tuesday 9/22	Afroasiatic languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 4: Afroasiatic. * <b>Wolff.</b> Chapter 10: Afroasiatic linguistic features and typology.	Discussion post
Thursday 9/24	Nilo-Saharan Languages	Heine & Nurse. Chapter 3: Nilo-Saharan. * <b>Wolff.</b> Chapter 11: Linguistic features and typologies in languages commonly referred to as 'Nilo-Saharan.'	Discussion post
Tuesday 9/29	Khoisan languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 5: Khoisan. * <b>Wolff.</b> Chapter 12: Linguistic features and typologies in languages commonly referred to as 'Khoisan.'	Discussion post
Thursday 10/1	Niger-Congo languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 2: Niger-Congo. * <b>Wolff.</b> Chapter 9: Niger-Congo linguistic features and typology.	Discussion post
PHONETICS and PHONOLOGY of AFRICAN LANGUAGES			
Tuesday 10/6	Phonemic inventories	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 123-134.	Discussion post
Thursday 10/8	Phonemic inventories	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 139-150	Discussion post
Tuesday 10/13	Syllable structure	*HANDOUT	Discussion post
Thursday 10/15	Vowel harmony	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 134-139. *HANDOUT	Discussion post
Tuesday 10/20	Presentations on adopted languages		
Thursday 10/22	Tone in African languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 152-158.	Discussion post

MORPHOLOGY of AFRICAN LANGUAGES			
Tuesday 10/27	Word classes	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 7: Morphology. Pp. 179-180.	Mid-term exam due
Thursday 10/29	Non-concatenative morphology	* <b>Childs.</b> Chapter 4: pp. 97-99. *HANDOUT	Discussion post
Tuesday 11/3	Verbal extensions	* <b>Childs.</b> Chapter 4: pp. 103-115 *HANDOUT	Discussion post
Thursday 11/5	Noun classes	* <b>Childs.</b> Chapter 4: pp. 99-103 *HANDOUT	Discussion post
Tuesday 11/10	Presentations on adopted languages		
Thursday 11/12	Ideophones	*Childs. Chapter 5: pp. 117-124.	Discussion post
SYNTAX of AFRICAN LANGUAGES			
Tuesday 11/17	Syntax overview	*Childs. 2003. <i>An Introduction to African Languages.</i> Chapter 5: pp. 118-124.	Discussion post
Thursday 11/19	No class	African Studies Association Conference	
Tuesday 11/24	Serial verbs	*G.Tucker Childs. 2003. <i>An Introduction to African Languages.</i> Chapter 5: pp. 137-141.	Discussion post
Thursday 11/26	No class	Thanksgiving	
Tuesday 12/1	Discourse: Information structure, logophoricity, consecutive tense <sup>147</sup>	*G.Tucker Childs. 2003. <i>An Introduction to African Languages.</i> Chapter 5: pp. 147-151.	Discussion post
Thursday 12/3	Presentations on adopted languages		
Tuesday 12/8	Wrap-up		Final paper due December 17