

# The Languages of Africa

LIN 4930/6932 . Section 105F . Spring 2014 . T 4 R 4-5 . Anderson 19

**Instructor:** Dr. Fiona Mc Laughlin

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**Hours:** Wednesdays: 1:00-3:00pm, Thursdays: 2:00-3:30pm & by appointment

## 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.

## Objectives

The objectives of this class are:

1. To provide students with a general understanding of the relationships between African languages, the typical and sometimes unique linguistic characteristics of African languages, and the major contemporary concerns within the field of African linguistics.
2. To train students to be able to propose and evaluate arguments about African languages.
3. To help students enhance their critical thinking, writing, and expository skills.

## Readings

There are three textbooks for this course:

Childs, G. Tucker. 2003. *An introduction to African languages*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

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

Vigouroux, Cécile & Salikoko S. Mufwene, eds. 2008. *Globalization and language vitality: perspectives from Africa*. London: Continuum.

These books are also available for in-library use at the reserve desk in Library West. There are also several supplemental readings on Sakai. These are marked by an asterisk on the schedule.

## Assignments

It is your responsibility to do all the readings for this class and come prepared to answer questions about them, discuss them, and ask questions about points that you would like clarification on. For each unit, you will be provided with a set of topics to think about as you do your readings, often accompanied by short assignments. Together, these comprise the *Preparation and participation* component of the class, worth a total of 25% of your grade. In addition, you will participate in a group presentation based on the readings you do from the Vigouroux & Mufwene volume. Starting with Week 8, you will be given regular problem sets with data from African languages as homework. There are two in-class exams and a final exam. The final is cumulative.

## **Grades**

<b>Grades will be based on the following work:</b>		<b>%</b>
Preparation & participation		25
Homework problem sets		20
Group presentation		5
Exam 1		15
Exam 2		15
Final exam		20
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

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

A 92-100	B 81-84.9	C 71-74.9	D 61-64.9
A- 88-91.9	B- 78-80.9	C- 68-70.9	D- 58-60.9
B+ 85-87.9	C+ 75-77.9	D+ 65-67.9	E Below 58

You may consult the following website to see how the final letter grade is weighted with regard to overall GPA: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

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

The 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. You are not permitted to use laptops for taking notes in the classroom. Assignments must be handed in in hard copy. No electronic versions of assignments will be accepted without prior permission from the professor. Mutual respect for class members is expected at all times in order to ensure a positive learning environment for a productive and enjoyable semester.

### **Make-up exams**

Make-up exams will be given only in the case of a documented illness or emergency. In such cases it is the student's responsibility to inform the professor in advance of the scheduled exam. Failure to do so will result in a grade of 0 for the exam.

### **Academic dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty, including cheating on exams and homework as well as plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Any student engaging in such activities will be dealt with in accordance with University policy and receive a failing grade for the course. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes plagiarism. If you have any questions about it, please consult the professor. Resource: [www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/academicguide.php](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/academicguide.php)

### **Students with disabilities**

If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this class, you should contact the dean of Students Office ([www.dso.ufl.edu/drp/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drp/)) so that special arrangements can be made to accommodate you.

**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.**

	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
<b>UNIT 1: Introduction</b>		
Week 1 1/7-9	Introduction to the languages of Africa	H&N Chapter1 Childs Chapter 1
Week 2 1/14-16	Language in African societies	H&N Chapter 12 (Wolff) Childs Chapter 7
Week 3 1/21-23	Work on assignments (no class on 1/21) Visit Kongo exhibit at Harn Museum	Readings from Vigouroux & Mufwene: Chapter 1 + TBA.
Week 4 1/28-30	Language endangerment & vitality in Africa Group presentations (1/30)	
<b>UNIT 2: Classifying African languages</b>		
Week 5 2/4-6	Classification of African languages	*Irvine (2008) *Makoni & Pennycook (2005) Childs Chapter 2
Week 6 2/11-13	The language families of Africa: Niger-Congo & Nilo-Saharan	H&N Ch.2 (Williamson & Blench) H&N Ch.3 (Bender)
Week 7 2/18-20	The language families of Africa: Afroasiatic & Khoisan	H&N Ch.4 (Hayward) H&N Ch.5 (Güldemann & Vossen)
<b>UNIT 3: Phonetics &amp; phonology of African languages</b>		
Week 8 2/25-27	The phonetics of African languages	H&N Ch.6 (Clements 123-134) Childs Chapter 3:55-66
	<b>Exam 1: 2/27</b>	
<b>MARCH 4-6 SPRING BREAK</b>		
Week 9 3/11-13	The phonology of African languages	H&N Ch.6 (Clements 134-160) Childs Ch. 3:66-95
Week 10 3/11-13	The phonology of African languages	*Downing (2004)
<b>UNIT 4: Morphology of African languages</b>		
Week 11 3/25-27	The morphology of African languages	H&N Ch.7 (Dimmendaal) Childs Ch. 4
Week 12 4/1-3	The morphology of African languages	*Childs (1994) *Dingemanse (2011)
Week 13 4/8-10	<b>Exam 2: 4/10</b>	H&N Ch.8. (Watters)

### **UNIT 5: Syntax of African languages**

Week 14      The syntax of African languages      H&N Ch.9 (Creissels)  
4/13-17

Week 15      The syntax of African languages      Childs Ch. 5  
4/22

**4/28      FINAL EXAM 5:30-7:30pm in Anderson 19**