

# Languages of Africa

LIN 4930/6932 . SSA 4930 . Fall 2023 . MWF Period 6 (12:50-1:40) MATHERLY 116

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**Office:** 305 Pugh Hall  
**Office hours:** Monday: 11-12 (in person) & Thursday 3-4 (virtual, e-mail me in advance)  
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## DESCRIPTION

Welcome to Languages of Africa. 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 consider how knowledge about African languages has been produced within a history of colonialism, **neo-colonialism**, and racism. 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, and 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.

All additional required readings are available on Canvas and are marked by an asterisk on the schedule.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ATTENDANCE POLICY

As part of our classroom community, you are required to attend class, complete readings and assignments on time, and participate in class panels, discussions, and activities. These requirements are interrelated: you cannot do one without the other. There may be times when something such as illness, an emergency, a religious holiday, or an activity will prevent your attendance, in which case you will be given the opportunity to make up the missed work. This provision will not apply to non-emergencies like oversleeping or working. In the case of illness or an emergency, please contact me by e-mail as soon as it is feasible for you to do so to discuss how you will make up what you have missed. If you are participating in a university or athletic event that requires travel, or if you will be observing a religious holiday, please let me know in advance by e-mail to make arrangements regarding readings and assignments.

## GRADES

Grades will be based on the following work:

Homework assignments	20%
Adopted language work	20%
Essay	10%
Exam 1 (in class)	20%
Exam 2 (in class)	20%
Presentation	10%
<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

You may consult the following website to see how the final letter grade is weighted with regard to overall GPA: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

## CLASSROOM CULTURE

Our guidelines on classroom culture reflect respect for yourself, your classmates, and your professor. Cell phones must be silenced and put away in a backpack or purse by the time class begins. Please do not leave them sitting on your desk as they will distract you from our lectures and discussions. You may take notes on your laptop if you prefer that to a notebook, but please do not engage in activities on your laptop that are not related to class because it can be

distracting to students sitting behind you. Please be punctual and arrive on time for class. When we discuss controversial topics in class, please be respectful of other students, including those who have points of view that may differ from your own. The university classroom should be an open space for debate and the exchange of ideas.

## COMMUNICATION

I communicate with students outside of class through UF e-mail. Please be sure to check your UF e-mail on a regular basis. You should familiarize yourself with professional e-mail etiquette and apply it in your communications with all your professors.

e-mail basics:

- *Specify subject.* Subject line should include the topic of the message and class title.
- *Greet & Close.* E-mails should begin with a formal greeting and end with you signing your name in all messages/emails.
- *Check writing.* Proofread your message before sending.

## GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

### Access

Students who require academic accommodation to access the full benefits of this class may apply through the Disability Resource Center <https://disability.ufl.edu> . You should share your accommodation letter with me as early as possible so that I can make appropriate arrangements.

### Academic honesty

As a UF student you have subscribed to the Student Code of Honor. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, is a violation of that Code. Any student engaging in such activities will be dealt with in accordance with University policy and receive a failing grade for the course.

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

### AI

Text-generating artificial intelligence programs such as ChatGPT, Bard, and the like have recently become openly accessible. Their implications for education are highly debated, controversial, and speculative. I encourage you not to use a program like ChatGPT for work in this class so that you can hone your writing skills, but I understand the allure of using it and will not forbid it. If you use it, you should state this clearly on your assignment and hand in all versions of texts the program generated along with your final text. Using AI while failing to acknowledge it is plagiarism and will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment.

### Course evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at

<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>

## **Class recording**

Pursuant to Florida House Bill 233, a summary of which you can see [here](#), please note the following:

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

## **Campus resources**

### **Health and Wellness**

*U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

*Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

*Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the [Student Health Care Center website](#).

*University Police Department:* Visit [UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.](#)

### Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

**Career Connections Center:** Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

**Library Support:** Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

**Teaching Center:** Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

**Writing Studio:** 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

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>			
Wednesday 8/23	Introduction	*Childs. Chapter 1: Introduction.	
Friday 8/25	Language in African society	Heine & Nurse. Chapter 12: Language and society.	
<b>AFRICAN LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION</b>			
Monday 8/28	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.	
Wednesday 8/30	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.	
Friday 9/1	Grammar adoption	Meet in Library West, first floor by elevators	
Wednesday 9/6	The comparative method	Heine & Nurse. Chapter 10: Comparative linguistics.	Essay due

Friday 9/8	The comparative method	HANDOUT	
Monday 9/11	Afroasiatic languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 4: Afroasiatic. <b>*Wolff.</b> Chapter 10: Afroasiatic linguistic features and typology.	*HW due
Wednesday 9/13	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.'	
Friday 9/15	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.'	
Monday 9/18	Niger-Congo languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 2: Niger-Congo. <b>*Wolff.</b> Chapter 9: Niger-Congo linguistic features and typology.	
<b>PHONETICS and PHONOLOGY of AFRICAN LANGUAGES</b>			
Wednesday 9/20	Phonemic inventories	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 123-134.	
Friday 9/22	Phonemic inventories	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 139-150	
Monday 9/25	Syllable structure	HANDOUT	
Wednesday 9/27	Syllable structure		*HW due
Friday 9/29	Vowel harmony	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 134-139. HANDOUT	
Monday 10/2	Vowel harmony		*HW due
Wednesday 10/4	Tone in African languages	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 6: Phonology. pp. 152-158.	
Monday 10/9	In-class exam		
<b>MORPHOLOGY of AFRICAN LANGUAGES</b>			
Wednesday 10/11	Word classes	<b>Heine &amp; Nurse.</b> Chapter 7: Morphology. pp. 179-180.	
Friday 10/13	Non-concatenative morphology	<b>*Childs.</b> Chapter 4: pp. 97-99. HANDOUT	
Monday 10/16	Non-concatenative morphology		
Wednesday 10/18	Verbal extensions	<b>*Childs.</b> Chapter 4: pp. 103-115 <b>*HANDOUT</b>	*HW due

Friday 10/20	Noun classes	* <b>Childs.</b> Chapter 4: pp. 99-103 *HANDOUT	
Monday 10/23	Noun classes		*HW due
Wednesday 10/25	Ideophones	*Childs. Chapter 5: pp. 117-124.	
Friday 10/27	Ideophones	*Dingemanse TBA	
Monday 10/30	In-class exam		
<b>SYNTAX of AFRICAN LANGUAGES</b>			
Wednesday 11/1	Syntax overview	*Childs. Chapter 5: pp. 118-124.	
Friday 11/3	Serial verbs	*Childs. 2003. Chapter 5: pp. 137-141.	
Monday 11/13	Information structure	*Childs. Chapter 5: pp. 147-151.	
Wednesday 11/15	Information structure		
Friday 11/17	NO CLASS	Presentation preparation	
Monday 11/20	NO CLASS	Presentation preparation	
Monday 11/27		Presentations	Presentations
Wednesday 11/29		Presentations	Presentations
Friday 12/1	Fieldwork	*Mc Laughlin & Sall 2001	
Monday 12/4	Fieldwork		
Wednesday 12/6	Wrap-up		