**Possible topics for BA/MA thesises supervised by Hilde Gunnink**

1. **Bantu-Khoisan language contact**

Bantu languages spoken in southern Africa are known to have been in contact with various “Khoisan” languages. This has resulted in the adoption of clicks in various Bantu languages, but also in other, less obvious types of structural and/or lexical interference. As part of my ongoing research project, various thesis topics are possible:

* **Herero and Wambo**  
  Herero and Wambo are major Bantu languages spoken in Namibia, and have both been described in a fair amount of detail (e.g. Baucom 1972; Elderkin 2001; Fivaz and Shikomba 2003; Kavari 2013, among others; Möhlig and Kavari 2008; Möhlig et al. 2002). Although neither language makes use of clicks, ongoing contact with Khoisan languages, most notably Khoekhoe, makes the presence of Khoisan influence in other domains of the language likely. Such has already been proposed for the presence of head-final nominal compounds in Herero. A possible thesis topic would be the investigation of such Khoisan influence, either based on published sources or by combining these with original fieldwork.
* **Clicks in South African Bantu languages**  
  In the Nguni languages and the Southern Sotho languages, Khoisan influence is obvious in the form of click consonants. Possible sources for click words in these languages are lexical borrowings from Khoisan languages, click insertion (motivated by the sociolinguistic practice of *hlonipha* and/or by sound symbolism) and neologisms. The last attempt at identifying Khoisan lexical borrowings in South African Bantu languages took place in the seventies of the previous century, and since then, the documentation of Khoisan languages and their classification has much improved.   
  Possible research topics include:
  + Are clicks in Southern Sotho the result of Nguni influence? Southern Sotho is one of only two Sotho languages using clicks, and many Southern Sotho click words are shared with Nguni languages. A thorough comparison between Southern Sotho and Nguni click words, on the basis of published sources, may resolve the question of the origin of clicks in Southern Sotho.
  + How was the Nguni click lexicon created? Recent research (Gunnink 2022) attributed a small part of the Nguni click lexicon to Proto-Nguni, but the majority of click words in individual Nguni languages cannot be reconstructed to an ancestral stage of the language. This research would investigate the origin of these click words, in one or more Nguni languages, by considering etymologies such as borrowing from Khoisan languages or click insertion, based on published data.
  + Are there traces of clicks in Southern Bantu languages that currently do not make use of clicks? Or are there clicks in Southern Bantu language varieties whose better described sister varieties are known to be clickless (investigating this would require fieldwork)?
* **Tonal depression**In Gunnink et al. (submitted) it is suggested that tonal depression (lowering high tones after particular classes of consonants) in Southern Bantu may have its origin in Khoisan contact. Testing this theory by comparing the depressor consonant inventories of Khoisan and Southern Bantu languages would be a possible thesis topic.

1. **Ongoing Bantu/Khoisan contact**

Historical Bantu/Khoisan contact situations have been studied extensively (Argyle 1994-95; Argyle 1986; Bostoen and Sands 2012; Gunnink 2020, forthcoming; Gunnink et al. 2015; Louw 1974, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1979, 1986; Pakendorf et al. 2017; Sommer and Voßen 1992), but not so much from a synchronic point of view. Nonetheless, in various parts of Southern Africa contact between speakers of Bantu and Khoisan languages is still ongoing, and many native speakers of Khoisan languages have acquired a Bantu languages as their second language. These ongoing contact situations provide an ideal opportunity for testing hypotheses about Khoisan-Bantu contact, where, unlike in historical contact situations, the sociolinguistic settings can be studied in detail through targeted fieldwork. Possible contact situations to be studied include Herero (Bantu) as spoken by native Juǀ’hoan (Kx’a, Khoisan) speakers in Namibia, or Kgalagadi as spoken by native speakers of various Khoisan languages in Botswana.

1. **Bantu historical linguistics**

The Bantu languages of Southern Africa are clearly (closely) related, but detailed studies of their historical developments are still lacking. Possible thesis topics would include applying the comparative method to reconstruct lower-level ancestral languages, their phonologies, lexicon, and the sound changes that affected their daughter languages. This research can be done using existing data, but fieldwork is also possible.

1. **Prehistorical Bantu-Bantu language contact**

Southern African Bantu languages of Guthrie’s zone S have traditionally been divided into six clusters, Shona, Venda, Sotho, Nguni, Tsonga and Copi. Recent linguistic research (Gunnink et al. submitted) shows these languages to derive from a direct, shared ancestor most likely situated within Southern Africa. Archaeological evidence, on the other hand, points towards multiple migrations of Bantu speakers to Southern Africa, suggesting that the languages of the earlier migrants are not the linguistic ancestors of modern Southern African Bantu languages. However, it is possible that language shift left an older Bantu substrate in the surviving Bantu languages. Evidence for such a substrate is seen from a set of lexemes that have a Bantu origin but have followed deviant sound correspondences. This research would be aimed at identifying these lexemes and their possible donor language(s), and interpreting the results in terms of historical contact situations. This research can be done with existing, published data, but fieldwork is also possible.

1. **Language description**

Any topic in the field of language description, either based on fieldwork (in Africa or with speakers of African languages living in Europe) or working on published data.

1. **African English(es)**

English as spoken in various African countries differs markedly from that spoken in the United Kingdom. Possible topics for a thesis could be a study of the differences between a specific variety of African English and (more) standard varieties, for instances differences in phonology, syntax, and lexicon. Such a study could be based on fieldwork, or by making use of, for instance, English language radio or television broadcasts, or English as used by Africans online.

1. **Formulaic expressions**

Formulaic expressions, such as what one uses to greet or thank, vary greatly from language to language, but are rarely studied from a linguistic point of view. A possible thesis topic would be to study these expressions, either in a single language (in which case fieldwork would be required) or comparatively, in which case existing data may be used, for instance from the endangered languages archive (ELAR).

1. **Resources**

The following resources are available that may inspire research topicsː

* 1. Namibia Biodiversity Database: https://www.biodiversity.org.na/index.php  
     Contains data on the names of plant and animal species found in Namibia in 16 Namibian languages.
  2. Southern Bantu Lexical Dataset: <https://osf.io/7waus/>

Contains data on 100 basic lexical concepts in 34 Southern Bantu languages, including cognacy judgments. Can be used, for instance, for linguistic reconstruction, studying semantic change, etc.

* 1. Ancestral Voices: <https://saheritagepublishers.co.za/ancestral-voices/>  
     Contains texts written in various South African languages by native speakers. Interesting from a linguistic, cultural and historical perspectives.
  2. African bird names: <https://meyerij9.wixsite.com/africanbirdnames>  
     Contains data on bird names in various African languages, focused on Southern Africa. Can be used, for instance, to study language contact, semantics of bird names, etc

Anyone interested in these or related topics is welcome to e-mail me at [hilde.gunnink@ugent.be](mailto:hilde.gunnink@ugent.be) for further details.

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