



AFRA
INSTITUT FÜR
AFRIKANISTIK

Afrikanistisches Kolloquium

Freitag, 30.01.2026, 12-14 Uhr,
Campus Westend, SKW-Gebäude, Raum 05 B-113

Tom Güldemann

The Niger-Congo family in time and space: a first attempt"

While Africanists have until recently been treating Greenberg's continental language classification with just 4 super-families as the unchallenged reference point, general linguists working in the historical-comparative framework have characterized it as "badly in need of major reinvestigation and reworking" (Campbell and Poser 2008: 128). In Güldemann (2018), I provide such a classificatory reassessment from inside African linguistics. My framework not only differs from Greenberg's genealogical proposal as such but also takes macro-areal linguistic patterns into account, which can sometimes be as informative as genealogical relations (Nichols 2010).

Campbell, Lyle and William J. Poser. 2008. *Language classification: history and method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Güldemann, Tom. 2018. *The languages and linguistics of Africa*. *The World of Linguistics* 11. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Nichols, Johanna. 2010. Macrofamilies, macroareas, and contact. In Hickey, Raymond (ed.), *The handbook of language contact*. Oxford/ Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 361-379.

Tom Güldemann received his doctoral and postdoctoral training at the Universities of Leipzig and Cologne. He is currently Professor for African linguistics and sociolinguistics at the Humboldt University Berlin. He works in the fields of linguistic typology, language documentation, grammatical change, and both genealogical and areal linguistics including its interface with non-linguistic disciplines for the reconstruction of early population history. He also specializes in the documentation and description of so-called "Khoisan" languages with field and archival work on both living and extinct languages. More recently, he edited a survey of African linguistics that includes his two major studies on genealogical and areal language relationships of the continent (Güldemann 2018).

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