

PhD scholarship in historical-comparative linguistics

The research unit LLACAN (*Langage, langues et cultures d'Afrique*, CNRS-INALCO-EPHE, Paris) invites applications for two three-year PhD positions, as part of the project **OriKunda: On the origins of Chikunda, “a language without a land”**, funded by the French *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* (ANR-22-CE54-0009-01) in the form of a Research Grant awarded to Rozenn Guérois (PI, CNRS-LLACAN).

About the OriKunda project

The OriKunda project (04.2023-03.2027) aims to revise the unique history of the Chikunda people, from its genesis until today, through their language. Originally, the Chikunda were troops of Bantu-speaking slave soldiers from different communities who defended land concessions ("prazos") owned by Portuguese settlers along the Lower Zambezi River (central Mozambique) during the colonial era. From a common social identity came an ethnic identity involving the creation of a language, Chikunda, resulting from intra-Bantu dialect and language mixing. With the collapse of the "prazo" system in the 19th century and the emancipation of slaves, the Chikunda retreated westwards to the confluence of the Zambezi and Luangwa Rivers, which today corresponds to the border area between Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. The available sources on the Chikunda are essentially historical; notably the studies of Allen Isaacman. No linguistic material on the language is currently available, not even a grammatical sketch or a lexicon. Yet, the unusual history of the Chikunda raises fascinating questions from a linguistic point of view, with potentially major repercussions for the historical narrative of this community.

The OriKunda project aims to study the Chikunda language, both synchronically and diachronically. Three main research questions will be addressed: (1) What is the genesis of the Chikunda language? (2) What does the Chikunda cultural vocabulary tell us about Chikunda history? To which extent is Chikunda history reflected in its cultural vocabulary? (3) What is the vitality of Chikunda from its creation to the present day? Through these questions, the project falls within several subdisciplines of linguistics, including descriptive linguistics, historical linguistics, anthropological linguistics, and sociolinguistics.

PhD 1: Historical-comparative linguistics

Objectives

The doctoral researcher will explore the historical and anthropological linguistic components of the OriKunda project by conducting a comparative analysis based on the Words and Things method (from German *Wörter und Sachen*, cf. Malkiel 1993), which relies on both the Comparative method as well as diachronic semantics. Specifically, the PhD candidate will analyze cultural vocabulary linked to warfare, slavery, trade, and hunting in Chikunda (all of which relates to many aspects of the Chikunda's daily social organization) and compare vocabulary items with those from contact languages of the lower Zambezi River in order to check distributions, (possible) reconstructions, and (possible) evolutions of meaning.

The PhD position will include fieldwork in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, as well as information mining from available grammars and dictionaries. The fieldwork component will give priority to languages where lexical information is lacking or needs to be complemented, on the basis of existing literature.

The PhD candidate will have the opportunity to obtain a joint PhD degree (“co-tutelle”) with Ghent University (Belgium) under the co-supervision of Koen Bostoen and Maud Devos.

Activities

- Collect lexical data related to the semantic field of war, slave, trade, and hunting from databases, dictionaries, and grammatical descriptions of Central Mozambican languages;
- Collect lexical data in situ (Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique) to complement with that which has already been collected;
- Conduct a comparative analysis of the cultural lexicon according to the Words and Things model;
- Synthesize the results of the comparative processes.

Selection criteria

- A Master’s degree in linguistics and/or African studies or an equivalent degree by the start date;
- Background in descriptive and/or comparative linguistics;
- Training in field methods and research experience in analyzing languages without a written tradition (preferably Bantu languages), their environment and their speakers, is beneficial;
- Strong analytical skills and proven self-motivation to complete independent work;
- Strong team player qualities (you will work in an international team where communication is crucial to the success of the project);
- Strong proficiency in (spoken and written) English, reasonable command of Portuguese, and the desire to gain good working knowledge of French.

Our offer

- Full-time position, starting on October 1st 2023 for 36 months;
- Salary based on French and CNRS regulations (approx. 1700€ net salary);
- According to French labor laws, benefits include 30 days holiday per year plus Bank Holidays;
- An inspiring, international environment with the domain’s leading scientists at the LLACAN research unit (Paris region);¹
- Facilities, academic, and IT support, and appropriate allowances for fieldwork and conference attendance.

Your application

To apply please follow instructions at: <https://emploi.cnrs.fr/Offres/Doctorant/UMR8135-ROZGUE-001/Default.aspx?lang=EN>

As part of your application, you will have to upload a CV and a cover letter explaining your research background and interests. For all enquiries, contact Rozenn Guérois (rozenn.guerois@cnrs.fr).

Application Deadline: **25 May 2023**

¹ Web Address: <https://llacan.cnrs.fr/> (in French), https://llacan.cnrs.fr/index_en.php (in English)