COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
EN: Germanic Languages: Origins and Development **LT: Germanų kalbų kilmė ir raida**	

Lecturers	Department(s) where the course unit (module) is delivered
Coordinating: Assist. Prof. Dr. Rūta Šileikytė-Zukienė **Other:** Sr. Res. Dr. Artūras Ratkus Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ērika Sausverde	Faculty of Philology

Study cycle	Type of the course unit (module)
First	Elective

Mode of delivery	Period when the course unit (module) is delivered	Language(s) of instruction
Face-to-face	Spring semester	English

Requirements for students	
Prerequisites: B2 level of English	**Additional requirements (if any):** –

Number of ECTS credits allocated	Student's workload (total)	Contact hours	Individual work
5	150	52	98

Purpose of the course unit
The course is recommended for students of Germanic languages (English, German, and the Scandinavian languages), Finno-Ugric languages, and anyone interested in the languages and cultures of Northern Europe. The aim is to introduce students to the origins, historical development and rich diversity of the Germanic languages, by exploring their sounds, structures, histories and cultural expression across Europe and beyond.

The course combines three complementary strands. The lectures explore the historical development of the Germanic languages, focusing on major sound changes and the historical-comparative method. A series of seminars examines the diversity of the modern Germanic language family, from English, German, and the Scandinavian languages to lesser-known languages and varieties such as Scots, Frisian, Yiddish, Faroese, and Afrikaans. The focus then shifts to the earliest Germanic sources: runic inscriptions and Gothic texts. Through close reading, students examine the grammatical structures of Gothic, its Indo-European background, and parallels with other Germanic languages.

By studying the Germanic languages in depth as evolving linguistic and cultural traditions, students develop analytical, intercultural and creative competencies that prepare them for further study in linguistics, philology, literary studies and cultural research.

Learning outcomes of the course unit	**Teaching and learning methods**	**Assessment methods**
Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to: 1. Identify and classify the principal branches, languages and varieties of the Germanic language family, and explain their genetic relationships within the wider Indo-European language family. 2. Describe and analyse major developments in Germanic phonology, morphology, and lexis, using the principles of the historical-comparative method.	Interactive lectures, individual research.	Final written examination.
3. Read, translate, and comment on selected Gothic texts, demonstrating knowledge of their principal grammatical structures.	Seminars, collaborative activities; guided textual analysis, translation, comparative linguistic analysis.	Final written examination.
4. Relate the structures and development of Germanic languages to their broader historical, cultural, and geographical contexts.	Seminars, individual research, collaborative activities and student presentations; guest lectures and workshops focused on selected Germanic languages. Where possible, educational visits to relevant museums, libraries, or other cultural institutions.	Oral presentation. Final written examination.

Content: breakdown of the topics	Contact hours							Individual work: time and assignments	
	Lectures	Tutorials	Seminars	Workshop	Laboratory work	Internship/work placement	**Contact hours**	**Individual work**	**Tasks for individual work**
1. Introduction: Germanic peoples, languages and historical linguistics. The Germanic branch of Indo-European; early Germanic history and culture; Greek and Roman accounts. The development of comparative linguistics (Rask, Grimm, Bopp); the family-tree and wave models of language change.	6						**6**	**9**	Read the assigned materials: König & Auwera 2002, 1–18; 19–37;* engage in independent research on questions discussed in the lectures.
2. Common Germanic phonology, morphology and lexis. Major sound changes (Grimm's and Verner's Laws, the High German Consonant Shift); ablaut and umlaut. Germanic nominal and verbal systems, declension and conjugation patterns. Indo-European lexical heritage, shared Germanic vocabulary and early language contact (Celtic and Latin).	10						**10**	**15**	
3. Modern Germanic languages. Historical development and linguistic variation of English, German and Low German, Dutch, Frisian, Afrikaans and Yiddish; major sound changes and standardisation. North Germanic languages: Icelandic and its medieval literary heritage, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian (Bokmål and Nynorsk) and Faroese. Selected historical and modern texts and cultural contexts.			13				**13**	**13**	Read the assigned materials: König & Auwera 2002, 142–189; 349–387, etc.; Vikør 2001, chapters 1, 4, and 7;* prepare for seminar discussions; engage in independent research on

									questions discussed in the seminars.
4. Runic writing and the earliest Germanic records. The earliest written records in the Germanic languages. The Elder and Younger Futhark. The language, interpretation, and cultural context of runic inscriptions.			2				**2**	**4**	Read the assigned materials: König & Auwera 2002, 38–71;* prepare for seminar discussions; engage in independent research on questions discussed in the seminars.
5. Gothic language and texts. The place of Gothic within Indo-European and Germanic linguistics. Gothic texts and manuscripts. Orthography and pronunciation. The Gothic noun: grammatical categories, morphological structure and declension classes. Demonstrative and personal pronouns. Strong and weak verbs. Strong and weak adjective declensions. Close reading and linguistic analysis of selected Gothic texts.			17				**17**	**34**	Read the assigned materials: Bennett 1999, 1–7; 8–11; 12–15, etc.;* prepare for seminar discussions; engage in independent research on questions discussed in the seminars.
6. Preparation for the oral presentation		4					**4**	**10**	Prepare for an oral presentation on a selected Germanic language.
7. Preparation for the final exam								**13**	Revise and consolidate key concepts discussed in lectures and seminars.
Total:	**16**	**4**	**32**				**52**	**98**	

* Specific chapters and page ranges from the required reading list will be provided at the beginning of the semester.

Assessment strategy	Weight, %	Deadline	Assessment criteria
Oral presentation	30	To be assigned	Student performance in the oral presentation will be assessed according to the following criteria: • Relevance and depth of content (30%) – Demonstrates thorough understanding of the chosen Germanic language; presents accurate and relevant historical, linguistic, and cultural information. • Structure and organisation (20%) – The presentation is clearly structured, well-timed, and logically developed from introduction to conclusion. • Analytical insight (20%) – Provides thoughtful commentary on distinctive linguistic or literary features; shows ability to interpret examples critically. • Delivery and communication (15%) – Speaks clearly and confidently; maintains good contact with the audience; uses visual and/or audio aids effectively. • Engagement and response (15%) – Encourages discussion, responds thoughtfully to questions, and shows ability to adapt explanations to audience needs.
Final written examination	70	Exam days in June	**Structure and grading:** The exam consists of two parts, theoretical and practical. The theoretical part requires to discuss a number of theoretical issues discussed in latures and seminars and to illustrate them with relevant examples. The practical part involves translating and commenting on the distinct features of a short passage in Gothic. A full list of review questions will be provided beforehand. Student performance will be evaluated according to the following criteria: • Accuracy and completeness of knowledge: demonstrates sound understanding of the main features, classifications, and historical developments of the Germanic languages. • Analytical and comparative skills: shows ability to compare linguistic phenomena across different Germanic languages and identify shared or distinctive traits. • Application of linguistic reasoning: correctly analyses linguistic data (e.g., sound changes, morphological patterns or short text excerpts). • Clarity and coherence of written expression: presents arguments and explanations in clear, well-organised, and grammatically correct English. • Critical insight and reflection: demonstrates awareness of broader cultural, historical, or methodological implications.

Attendance policy

Attendance is compulsory for this course. Students who miss more than 30% of the seminars without a valid reason (such as medical or other officially documented circumstances) will not be allowed to take the final examination.

Use of AI tools

Generative AI may be used to explore ideas, clarify concepts and support learning in this course. AI can produce inaccurate information, misleading explanations and invented references. **Always verify** its suggestions against course materials and reliable academic sources, especially when working with linguistic examples, etymologies and historical language developments.

Submitted work must demonstrate **your own understanding, analysis and critical thinking**. Any use of generative AI in preparing assessed work must be clearly declared, specifying the tool and its purpose. You remain responsible for the accuracy of all information and references submitted and must be able to explain your arguments and examples.

Undeclared AI use or presenting AI-generated work as your own may constitute **academic misconduct**. Suspected breaches, together with supporting evidence, will be reported to the Faculty Dean and Academic Ethics Committee for consideration under Vilnius University procedures.

Course literature

Author(s)	Year of publication	Title	Publishing place and house or web link
Required reading **Note**: Specific chapters and page ranges from the required reading list will be provided at the beginning of the semester.			
Bennett, William Holmes	1999	*An Introduction to the Gothic Language*	New York: Modern Language Association of America
König, Ekkehard and Johan van der Auwera, eds.	2002	*The Germanic Languages*	London: Routledge
Vikør, Lars S.	2001	*The Nordic Languages: Their Status and Interrelations*	Oslo: Novus Press
Recommended reading			
Bandle, Oskar (ed.)	2005	*The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, 2 vols.	Berlin: Walter de Gruyter
Barnes, Michael P.	2012	*Runes: A Handbook*	Woodbridge: Boydell Press
Brinton, Laurel J., and Leslie K. Arnovick	2017	*The English Language: A Linguistic History. 3rd ed.*	Oxford: Oxford University Press
Fulk, R. D.	2018	*A Comparative Grammar of the Early Germanic Languages*	Amsterdam: John Benjamins
Harbert, Wayne	2007	*The Germanic Languages*	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Katz, Dovid	2004	*Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*	New York: Basic Books
McArthur, Tom	2002	*The Oxford Guide to World English*	Oxford: Oxford University Press
Miller, D. Gary	2019	*The Oxford Gothic Grammar*	Oxford: Oxford University Press
Putnam, Michael T., and B. Richard Page, eds.	2020	*The Cambridge Handbook of Germanic Linguistics.*	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Salmons, Joseph	2018	*A History of German: What the Past Reveals about Today's Language*, 2nd ed.	Oxford: Oxford University Press
Sanders, Ruth H.	2017	*The Languages of Scandinavia: Seven Sisters of the North*	Chicago: University of Chicago Press
Wright, Joseph	1997	*Grammar of the Gothic Language*	Oxford: Oxford University Press
Arsenyeva, M. G., S. P. Balashova, V. P. Berkov, and L. N. Solovyova.	2006	*Введение в германскую филологию* [Introduction to Germanic Philology]. 5th ed., revised and expanded	Moscow: GIS

Last updated: 20 October 2026