

## Curriculum Vitae: Menán du Plessis

I derive my main income at present by working as a free-lance transcriber and translator for the Hugh Brody Digital Archive of the †Khomani San, Special Collections, University of Cape Town (UCT). This work will come to an end in December 2017. I also work part-time as an Associate Editor (Humanities) for the *South African Journal of Science*. I am currently supervising a doctoral candidate in the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. The candidate is working on one of the eastern Kalahari Khoe languages.

I will shortly be leaving for the United States at the invitation of the Linguistics Society of America (LSA) to give a series of eight workshops on the Khoisan languages at their annual Summer Institute, which will be held this year at the University of Kentucky, over July 2017.

Plans for the future include the preparation of an introductory book on the languages of Africa (or perhaps only southern Africa to begin with). I am also in the process of devising a short course on the Khoisan languages, which could be offered online as part of the postgraduate offerings of the Department of General Linguistics, but could also be offered as a Summer School course.

- 2017.** Taught an introductory course on the Khoisan Languages to 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of Linguistics at Stellenbosch University at Stellenbosch University. Together with the doctoral candidate I am supervising, carried out fieldwork to document the highly endangered Tjwao language spoken by the Tsholotsho San of Zimbabwe.
- 2016.** Completed and submitted book on the Kora language. Taught short course at Stellenbosch University. Awarded grant from the Endangered Language Fund (ELF) at Yale University towards a project to document the highly endangered Tjwao language (eastern Kalahari Khoe) of Zimbabwe.
- 2015.** Visiting Professor in the Dept of Linguistics for the Spring Term at the University of Kentucky, Lexington. On return taught short course at Stellenbosch University.
- 2014.** Engaged in ongoing research, and taught short course at Stellenbosch. Worked towards a book on the language and heritage texts of the Korana people.
- 2013.** Became affiliated as a Research Associate in the Department of Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. Taught short course at Stellenbosch. Worked on the editing of Kora sound files.
- 2012.** Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Linguistics, UCT. Paid return visits to the two elderly Kora consultants.
- 2011.** Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Linguistics, UCT. Carried out critically urgent fieldwork to obtain recordings from two of the last speakers of Kora (or Ora, Khoekhoe Khoe), with funding in the form of a grant awarded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.
- 2010.** Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Linguistics, UCT.
- 2009.** Awarded the degree of PhD in Linguistics by UCT for a thesis titled, 'A unity hypothesis for the southern African Khoesan languages.'
- 2008–2009.** Held Lestrade scholarship for studies in African languages.
- 2008.** Accompanied Dr Levi Namaseb on a fieldtrip in December to record preliminary samples of Kora (or Ora).
- 2007.** Upgraded thesis to PhD.
- 2005.** Re-registered for an MA in Linguistics at UCT, with a new thesis topic in African Languages and Linguistics.
- 2004–2006.** Taught 2<sup>nd</sup> year semester course in Psycholinguistics, at UCT.
- 2003.** Resumed studies by reading in African Languages and Linguistics at the National Library of South Africa.
- 1990–2002.** Withdrew from academia because of ill-health, and in order to raise my two daughters.
- 1989.** Published second novel, *Longlive!* (David Philip, Cape Town).
- 1983–1986.** Tutored in the newly established Department of Linguistics at UCT, while also busy with a new work of fiction, engaging in political activism (as a member of the United Democratic Front, or UDF), and attempting to complete my doctoral dissertation.
- 1983.** Registered for MA –later upgraded to PhD– in the newly established Department of Linguistics at UCT, with a thesis on a topic in Semantics.

- 1983.** Published first novel, *A State of Fear* (David Philip, Cape Town), which received two literary prizes.
- 1981.** Graduated with a BA from UCT, as class medallist in my major subjects, English and African Literature, and with other courses in Xhosa, German and Italian, plus a course in Linguistics then offered only as part of an Honours level option.
- 1971–1980.** These post-matric years were punctuated by episodes of ill-health caused by painful and irreconcilable tensions between the demands of an undergraduate academic career, creative work, teaching, and political engagement (as a member of the National Union of South African Students, or NUSAS).
- 1970.** Matriculated. Awarded university entrance scholarship on the basis of matric results that included distinctions in English and Latin. Co-founded National Youth Action (or NYA), a non-racial movement of high-school students seeking free education for all.

**Forthcoming book** (expected Oct 2017 from Unisa Press & South African History Online)

*KORA: A lost Khoisan language of the early Cape and the Gariiep.*

Kora (known as Ora in the language itself), was the Khoisan language spoken by the Khoi people –or the Cape herders– of the early Cape and the Gariiep. As a member of the Khoe family, the language was related to South African and Namibian Khoekhoe dialects such as Nama and Dama, as well as to Kalahari Khoe varieties of Angola, Botswana and Zimbabwe, such as Khwe, Naro, Shua and Tshua. It was believed to be extinct until only a few years ago, when Mike Besten, an historian based at the University of the Free State, discovered while conducting fieldwork that a few elderly people still retained some fluency in the language. The linguists contributing to this book were part of a group that devised and carried out an emergency documentation in 2011, when they managed to obtain recordings from two of the last living speakers of Kora, Oupa Dawid Cooper and Ouma Jacoba Maclear. (Oupa Dawid died less than two years later.) This critically urgent work was made possible by the last-minute award of a grant from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. It was out of this experience, and after discussions with various participants and community members, that the idea for this book began to emerge. The over-riding purpose of the work, which is envisaged as an act of cultural restitution, is to retrieve the all but discarded linguistic heritage of the Korana and Griqua people of South Africa – not only for the latter-day descendants of these communities, but for all South Africans.

The two opening chapters describe the linguistic classification of the language, and the sources of our earlier information about it. The third and fourth chapters describe the sounds and structures of the language respectively, and together provide a complete reference grammar of the language. In a time-honoured tradition of comprehensive language description, the work also includes texts in the original language, and a dictionary. The heritage texts consist of historical narratives, accounts of cultural traditions, personal histories, folktales and the lyrics of songs. While most of this material has previously been published, the books and journals the pieces first appeared in are long since out of print and no longer readily available to the general public. In some cases, they were only ever provided with translations in German, which has compounded their inaccessibility. The newly edited texts are presented with parallel translations in English, and are extensively annotated. The two-way dictionary has been exhaustively compiled from all available sources. In the planned online version of the book, approximately one third of the entries will be linked to spoken examples provided by the two elderly speakers who worked with the linguists.

The detailed notes on the sounds and structures of the language should make it possible for dedicated readers to approach the texts in the original language. In this respect, the book meets an expressed desire of members of the present-day Korana and Griqua communities. The book will also be a source of primary material that is potentially valuable to researchers in fields such as theoretical linguistics or African languages, and will in addition provide enriching background reading for scholars specialising in aspects of African history, anthropology and archaeology. It will appeal equally, however, to the informed lay reader with a keen interest in the history of South Africa and the great diversity of its culture; while it should in general please anyone who is fascinated by the phenomenon of language.

**Published papers, book chapters, reviews and conference presentations.**

- 2016a.** ‘The click inventory of Kora (or Ora), a Khoekhoe KHOE language formerly spoken at the Cape and along the Gariep – reappraised in the light of data obtained from two last speakers.’ Paper presented at the *Fifth South African Microlinguistics Workshop (SAMWOP-5)*, held at the University of the Free State, 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.
- 2016b.** ‘Towards the study of South African literature as an integrated corpus.’ Review of Helize van Vuuren, *A Necklace of Springbok Ears: |Xam Orality and South African Literature* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2016). *South African Journal of Science* 112(11/12) 2016.
- 2016c.** ‘Notes on Qing’s own language.’ Chapter in José Manuel de Prada-Samper, Menán du Plessis, Jeremy Hollmann, Jill Weintraub, Justine Wintjes and John Wright, *On the Trail of Qing and Orpen* (Johannesburg: Standard Bank of South Africa, 2016), 103–123.
- 2016d.** ‘Casting the nets wide in the quest for ways to ‘Africanise’ research and teaching.’ Review of Brenda Cooper and Robert Morrell (Eds), *Africa-Centred Knowledges* (London: James Currey). *South African Journal of Science* 112(1/2) 2016.
- 2015.** ‘Areal and biological approaches in Khoesan Linguistics.’ Review of Tom Güldemann and Anne-Maria Fehn (Eds), *Beyond ‘Khoisan’: Historical relations in the Kalahari Basin* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam). *South African Journal of Science* 111(3/4) 2015.
- 2014a.** ‘The damaging effects of romantic mythopoeia on Khoesan Linguistics.’ *Critical Arts* 28(5)3 2014: 569–592.
- 2014b.** ‘One hundred years of the *Specimens* - a hundred years of linguistic neglect.’ Paper delivered at a conference to mark the publication centenary of *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, UCT, 17–20 August 2011. In J. Deacon and P. Skotnes (Eds) 2014, *The courage of //Kabbo: Collected papers from the conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of ‘Specimens of Bushman folklore* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press): 275–302.
- 2013.** Review of Rainer Vossen (Ed.): *The Khoesan Languages* (Routledge Language Family Series). *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 31(3) 2013: 389–391.
- 2013.** ‘New data on click genesis: further evidence that click-initial words shared by Khoesan and Bantu languages of southern Africa can be mapped as historically emergent from non-click forms reconstructed for Proto-Bantu.’ Paper presented at a conference on *Phonetics and Phonology of Sub-Saharan Languages* in honour of the late Tony Traill, University of the Witwatersrand, 7–10 July 2013.
- 2010.** ‘A first report on new linguistic material collected from elderly speakers of Kora.’ (This chapter was to have been co-authored with Levi Namaseb.) *Note:* This was originally written for inclusion in a book being edited by Mike Besten. Following the tragic death of our colleague in 2011, the project was cancelled. The paper has now been incorporated into one of the opening chapters of the book on the language of the Korana people.
- 2009.** ‘How to explain the emergence of clicks in Khoesan languages as well as other languages of southern Africa: two problems with a single solution?’ Paper presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference of the African Language Association of Southern Africa (ALASA), held at the University of the Western Cape, 8–10 July 2009.
- 2008.** ‘A plea for the renewal of Khoesan linguistic studies at South African universities.’ Paper presented at the Khoesan Convention convened by Mike Besten at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 11–13 April 2008.

### **Fieldwork.**

(1) Documentation of Tjwao (Kalahari Khoe), April 2017.

Tjwao, which now has only nine elderly rememberers, is the only eastern Kalahari Khoe variety spoken in Zimbabwe. Thanks to a grant awarded by the Endangered Language Fund (ELF) at Yale University, I was enabled to conduct fieldwork for the purpose of documenting this language. This work was carried out in April 2017, together with Admire Phiri, who is currently working towards a doctoral degree at Stellenbosch University, and a doctoral candidate from Rhodes University who had asked to join us. Some of the data we obtained will be analysed as part of Admire Phiri's doctoral study, and the rest will form the basis of various papers we intend to work on jointly over the coming year. A deposit of the data will be made with Yale University, and a suitable archive will be sought for a local housing.

(2) Documentation of Kora (Khoekhoe Khoe), September – December 2011.

In 2007, the historian Mike Besten discovered the existence of a few elderly individuals from Korana communities in and around Bloemfontein and Bloemhof who quite remarkably still retained some knowledge of the Kora language. After being contacted by him, I devised a suitable documentation project, and began applying for funding. Having finally obtained a Small Grant for the fieldwork component from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, I was enabled to carry out this critically urgent fieldwork in September of 2011 and again in December of that same year. Members of my team included two academics, Levi Namaseb and Niklaas Fredericks, who are first-language speakers of the related variety, Nama, as well as two keenly motivated cultural activists. From the end of April to August 2012, and again from October to the end of the year, I worked on the preparation of the collected data as well as the metadata. This work has entailed editing the recordings into individual sound files that illustrate the pronunciation of individual words both in isolation and in sentences; as well as the preparation of a two-way bilingual dictionary for inclusion in a comprehensive book on the Kora language. (The electronic version of the book will feature clickable links to illustrative soundfiles for approximately one third of the entries in the dictionary). Some of the data also continues to form the basis of various papers currently in progress. A preliminary deposit of our data has been made with the Electronic Language Archive (ELAR) at SOAS, and the work of preparing the remaining material for archiving is ongoing. A suitable repository has yet to be found in South Africa for a local housing of the material.

### **Literary publications (fiction).**

**1989.** *Longlive!* Cape Town: David Philip.

**1983.** *A State of Fear.* Cape Town: David Philip.

### **Teaching Interests.**

- General descriptive linguistics: framework-neutral approaches to linguistic description; topics in typology, and the fundamental metalanguage of linguistic description.
- Historical and comparative linguistics.
- African languages in general – the approximately 2000 languages (and four major phyla) of Africa: a typological and comparative introduction.
- The 300–400 languages of the Bantu family: comparative and historical linguistic studies, with some reference to the place of this group within Niger-Congo.
- The Khoisan languages of southern Africa: a typological and comparative introduction.
- Contemporary issues (practical, ethical and methodological) in documentary linguistics.

### **Personal.**

I am married to Renfrew Christie, who has recently retired from his post as Dean of Research at the University of the Western Cape. We live in Cape Town with our two daughters, who are both currently still studying.