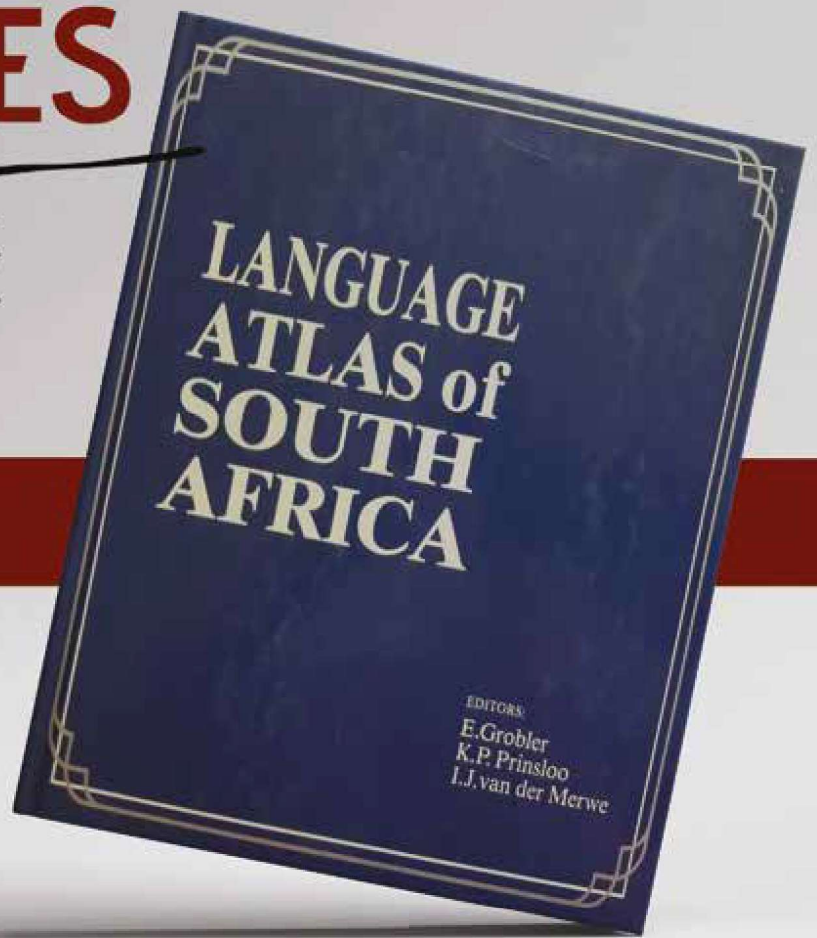


# LANGUAGES

and the  
arts.

## TWO DECADES



In 1970, shortly after the HSRC was established from the former National Bureau for Educational and Social Research, it established the Institute for Research into Language and the Arts. The institute's research played a valuable role in South Africa for just over 20 years before being phased out in 1991, writes *Dr Karel Prinsloo*, a former director.

In the field of arts, the institute's initial task was to compile extensive databases on important research documents, for example, original manuscripts, letters and newspaper cuttings, and to make them accessible to researchers. It established four documentation centres, each with its own collection of material. In some cases, these centres also compiled overviews and in-depth publications on these collections. Over time, all four centres began to increasingly conduct their own research.

In the field of language, the initial focus was on describing the state of the languages of the country and the associated problems and challenges. Key issues included: guidelines for place names; the promotion of literacy; languages in the workplace; the creation of terminology and dictionaries; the preparation of a language contact and distribution atlas, an overview of language courses; the role of language in education and in intergroup relations; and language policy and language planning for a multilingual South Africa and Namibia.



Researchers discussing the results of research into South African languages  
From left: Dr Gerard Schuring, Dr Flip Smit, Dr AJ van Rooy and Dr Karel Prinsloo  
Photo: supplied by Dr Karel Prinsloo

## Understanding language

The institute's sociolinguistics division was established in 1970, its main purpose being a countrywide investigation into the state of Afrikaans and English in South Africa. This investigation was requested by Dr Abraham Jonker in the House of Assembly in 1965 and was initiated by the SA Academy of Science and Arts (the SA Academy). This responsibility was subsequently transferred to the HSRC.

Dr Karel Prinsloo, who was the first head of department and later became director of the institute, gave direction to the entire research programme. He was succeeded by Dr Gerard Schuring, an expert in African languages.

The department expanded rapidly and its researchers, academics and other experts, conducted surveys among virtually all the language groups of South Africa and Namibia. The results were communicated in a series of reports, articles, conference papers and books, published by local and foreign publishers.

One of the last publications by members of the department and their colleagues in other parts of the world, was based on an event that was held at the HSRC's conference centre in 1992. The title of the publication was *Language, Law and Equality*, and the editors were Karel Prinsloo, Yvo Peeters, Joseph Turi and Christo van Rensburg.

A number of themes relating to language and the law are examined in this publication. These include: language and empowerment; dealing with language disputes; the constitutional status of language; the nature of language rights; the relationship between constitutional clauses and legal rights; other laws governing the use of language in the public and business sectors; the role of language in the courtroom, and the accessibility of the language of the law.

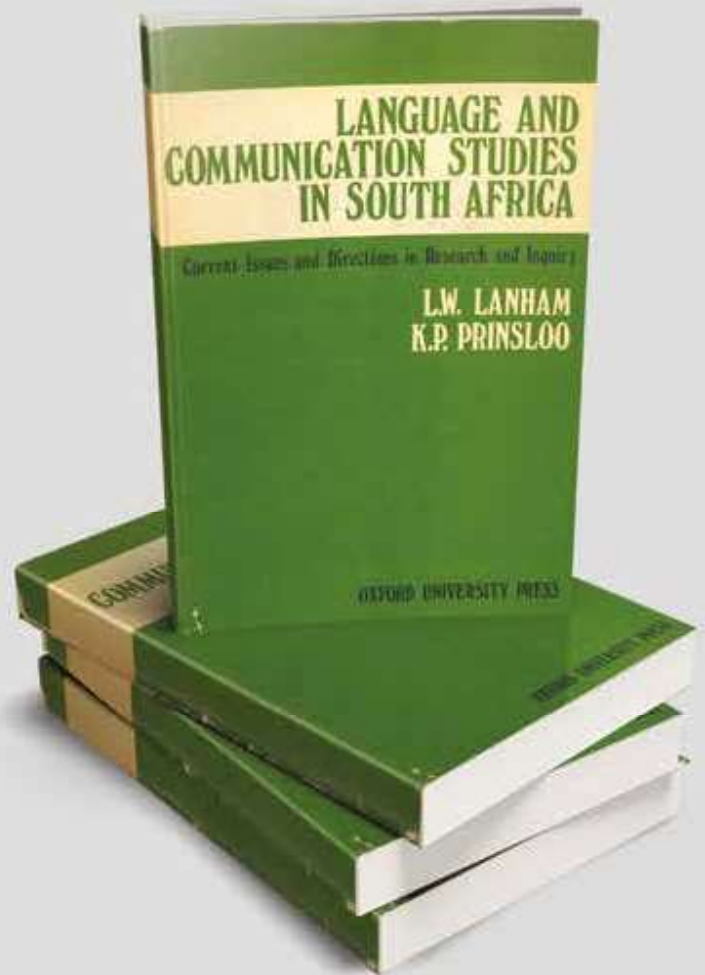
Experts from various parts of the world helped to analyse the complex relationship between language, law and political dynamics.

The publication is still used by those working in law, political science, sociolinguistics, language planning, translation and interpreting.

The department also housed a sound archive, which kept a few thousand tape recordings of language use. Researchers analysed these, including carrying out word counts and describing certain high-frequency language structures, for educational purposes.

## The history of names

The HSRC's Centre of Onomastic Sciences was established in January 1970, at the request of the SA Academy. Onomastic science is the study of the origin and forms of proper names of individuals or places. The centre was headed by Dr Peter Raper, who was



supported over the years by Prof. Gavie Nienaber and Dr Lucie Moller.

In 1971, Raper completed his doctoral thesis on the names of regions in South Africa and South West Africa. By the end of 1976, he had published 33 articles on onomastics.

Raper worked with various international bodies concerned with the standardisation and regulation of names. For example, he became a member of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in 1984. In 1983, he was awarded the PM Robbertse medal for outstanding performance in human sciences research.

## How children acquire language

In the institute's psycholinguistics division, the work was divided into two subsections. In the one, researchers continued to collect examples of children's use of language, to provide greater clarity on the nature of language acquisition. The other subsection worked on the development and standardisation of language tests, in cooperation with the HSRC's Institute for Psychological and Edumetric Research.

Led by Dr Jan Vorster (as the departmental head) and Dr Carol MacDonald, the division had significant international links. The HSRC's Afrikaans children's language corpus was included in the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES), a central repository for first-language acquisition data located at the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the USA.

### Studying words

The division for lexicology was established in 1981 to look at areas such as language in the workplace, the status of terminology in South Africa, dictionary projects and the use of computers for translation purposes.

Despite the small staff complement, headed by Dr Rose Morris, and including senior terminology expert Dr Mariëtta Alberts and a number of helpers, the division undertook a relatively extensive research programme, through research partnerships, for example with the University of South Africa and Rhodes University.

It also kept a computer database of SA dictionaries, dictionary projects and terminology lists.

### Documenting literature

Shortly after the establishment of the HSRC, Prof. PJ Nienaber and the SA Academy established a national

documentation centre for language and literature. This was subsequently taken over by the HSRC, under the leadership of Dr PG du Plessis, director of the institute, and Dr Pirow Bekker, who headed the centre.

The focus was initially on Afrikaans, but in 1981 the research interests of the English and African languages also gained attention, with the establishment of the Centre for South African Literature Research. The documentation centre collaborated closely with the documentation centre for English in Grahamstown as well as with those focusing on the African languages at various universities.

The centre produced a wide range of publications on topics such as literary bibliographies, annual literature reviews, analyses of the contributions of prominent authors, literary research and research on literature in education, and overviews of the South African literary system and of race and literature.

It also played an important administrative role in the awarding of certain prestigious literature prizes, including the Rapport prize and the Louis Luyt prize.

### History of art

Already in the 1950s, the SA Academy had worked to establish a bureau for documenting art history. The HSRC subsequently established the Centre for Art-Historical



*The SABC Youth Symphony Orchestra rehearsing at the old SABC studios at Broadcast House, Johannesburg, in 1974*

*Photo: HSRC archives*



Researchers who worked on the 1986 edition of the South African Music Encyclopedia. (from left) Sarita Hauptfleisch, head of department at the Centre for South African Music Research, Dr Karel Prinsloo, director of the Institute for Research into Language and the Arts at the time, and Marie-Louise Thomas, an expert in the field of music research

Photo: supplied by Dr Karel Prinsloo

Research, which, like the other centres, initially collected important documents and made them available to the research community. In 1980, all four of the institute's centres shifted their focus towards conducting research on priority topics.

Examples of important research programmes and projects included those on South African architects, and studies on architecture (e.g. in Johannesburg), rock art, individual artists, and conservation issues in South Africa.

This centre was headed by Murray Schoonraad, who was succeeded by Liliana Daneel. Later, Dr Gerard-Mark

van der Waal oversaw its transition to a research centre.

### Drawing attention to theatre

The HSRC's Centre for South African Theatre Research (CESAT) studied the history, function and influence of theatre in the country, collected material and issued related publications, drawing attention to theatre as an art form, a social artefact and an industry.

CESAT was founded in 1971 by Prof. PJ Nienaber. Dr PPB Breytenbach was the first curator and was succeeded by Rinie Stead. In 1979, it was formally renamed the Centre for South African Theatre Research. Here, Dr Temple Hauptfleisch and his

team made outstanding contributions in the form of programmes and projects on: the history of theatre in South Africa; puppet shows; theatre and society; black theatre, amateur dramatics; race relations in South African theatre; and the educational role played by drama and theatre.

### Promoting music science

The origin of the Centre for South African Music Research (CESAM) dates back to 1970 when its predecessor, the Documentation Centre for Music, came into being at the HSRC. Its purpose was to provide storage space for music-related artefacts for research purposes. Such material included musical scores,



photographs, scrapbooks, concert programmes, newspaper clippings, and letters and diaries of South African musicians.

From 1979, in addition to other projects, work at the CESAM (by then also a research centre) was focused on completing the *South African Music Encyclopedia*, under its chief editor Prof. JP Malan, who also headed CESAM. This was published in 1985 and regarded as a high point for the CESAM. The four-part encyclopedia was published separately in Afrikaans and English by Oxford University Press. It was not only a specialised work intended for music experts but also related the story of South Africa's political, economic and industrial history in musical terms.

Malan was subsequently awarded the Stals prize for the promotion of music science by the SA Academy. He was succeeded by Dr Cosmo Henning, Dr Pax Paxinos and Sarita Hauptfleisch.

### Highlights

In the area of language and the arts, for more than 20 years the Institute for Research into Language and the Arts cooperated extensively with external bodies, including language

bureaus, cultural boards, universities, dictionary offices, learned societies and associations, and private collectors of important research material, among others. International and local guest researchers and lecturers were integrated into the institute's programmes.

The institute also played an important liaison role within the HSRC and with external stakeholders. It held conferences that were attended by leading overseas and local delegates. The institute was often contacted by the media (newspapers, radio and TV) for news items relating to language, culture and the arts, which introduced the HSRC's work to a wider audience.

With the inauguration of the new HSRC building in Pretoria, the language and arts centres played a role in the presentation of a national book kaleidoscope, together with the HSRC library. An art exhibition was also held in cooperation with leading South African artists, as well as an inaugural conference on SA and its people.

According to a 1985 survey that the institute conducted, it produced 491 publications from 1970 to 1985. Besides the *South African Music Encyclopedia*, it also produced numerous reference

lists and bibliographies, annual literary reviews, arts reports, articles in popular magazines, academic journals, books by outside publishers, and book chapters. In addition, it published papers, policy recommendations, a series of linguistic reports resulting from the national languages investigation, a description of the language situation in Namibia, and a series on the naming of places.

### The end of an era

During 1991, extensive restructuring took place at the HSRC. This affected research on language and the arts, which was largely phased out. All documentation was subsequently transferred to the State Archives in Pretoria.

In the area of language and the arts, new structures came into being, established by the public service, including the Arts and Culture Task Group, the Languages Task Group, the Pan South African Language Board and a national arts council.

The HSRC's language and arts research played an important role in South Africa for over 20 years. Despite the cultural boycott against South Africa, contacts abroad were maintained and expanded. This was made possible because various foreign experts believed in the integrity and quality of HSRC research in the areas of language and the arts.

After the phasing out of research in these fields, most of the institute's staff members obtained other attractive positions in which they could pursue their passion, for example as lecturers, research managers, professors, publishers, consultants, writers and poets.

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