

## PREFACE

This volume is the result of a linguistic field excursion to South Africa in 2016. This excursion was the fourth field excursion carried out by Helsinki Area and Language Studies (HALS) during the years 2013–2016.<sup>1</sup> HALS was formed with the aim of exploring new avenues towards collaborative research in language documentation and descriptive linguistics, with an explicit goal of incorporating ethnolinguistic and historical insights. Area-specific academic traditions and practices differ from one area to another. Across different geographical spaces, we find separate research traditions, different kinds of available source material, and varying linguistic settings. Therefore, language documentation, descriptive linguistics, and language sociological approaches vary between research sites.

Our work on South African Ndebele varieties was initially sparked by a constellation of various factors. Several Nguni languages are rather well-documented. Some languages of this family with higher speaker numbers, in particular isiXhosa and isiZulu, have been grammatically described and analysed in considerable detail. Lexicographers have carried out extensive work. Language practitioners have long been working towards creating standard varieties and developing educational materials. Software products have followed suit and enable their widespread digital use. Such a backdrop of (socio)linguistic engineering and language planning interventions may have a unifying effect for some of the bigger varieties, but it also threatens dialect diversity and the status of less widely used varieties. These dynamics are by no means merely recent phenomena or products of modern times. Multilingualism and language contact have long affected the varieties under investigation in this volume of *Studia Orientalia* in many respects.

A significant point with regard to these contact scenarios is that they involve several closely related languages. In a project with the title “Stability and change

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<sup>1</sup> For more on HALS, see <[helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/hals](http://helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/hals)>. Proceedings of these field excursions have been published in the following volumes:

Shagal, Ksenia & Heini Arjava (eds) 2016. *Mordvin Languages in the Field*. (Uralica Helsingiensia 10) Helsinki: The Finno-Ugrian Society.

Makartsev, Maxim & Max Wahlström (eds) 2016. *In Search of the Center and Periphery: Linguistic Attitudes, Minorities, and Landscapes in the Central Balkans*. (Slavica Helsingiensia 49) Helsinki: Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki.

Gruzdeva, Ekaterina & Juha Janhunen (eds) 2016. *Crosslinguistics and Linguistic Crossings in Northeast Asia: Papers on the Languages of Sakhalin and Adjacent Regions*. (Studia Orientalia 117) Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.

in language contact: the case of southern Ndebele (South Africa)", a team of four people (Lotta Aunio, Thera Crane, Axel Fleisch, and Stephan Schulz) embarked on disentangling some of the Ndebele contact history. Project work started in late 2014, with the first fieldwork in 2015 in Pretoria and Moloto/Kwamhlanga. This work was possible due to a research grant from the Academy of Finland starting in September 2014. We acknowledge the financial support from the Academy and would also like to express our gratitude to the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki, and in particular the staff of the Department of World Cultures, for their logistic as well as academic support on many occasions.

The research of the initial project team is related to the research cluster Helsinki Area and Language Studies (HALS). The launch of HALS in the spring of 2013 marked a crucial moment for the conceptual and logistic preparations of the Ndebele language contact project. We would like to thank HALS for the financial support that made the field excursion possible, but also draw attention to the intellectual impact our HALS colleagues had on our Ndebele research throughout. Our colleagues in the research cluster have significantly contributed through their engagement with HALS, for which we are grateful.

Many South African stakeholders are concerned with the Ndebele varieties. Academic peers, language practitioners, local activists, and cultural entrepreneurs, as well as many members of the Ndebele communities, have supported us in our research in various ways.

At the National Lexicography Unit (NLU) for isiNdebele, first the late Dr P.B. Skhosana, and now its current director Dr Sponono Mahlangu, have supported our work for a long time. We are indebted to their support and hope that the NLU will benefit from the work published in this special issue. The NLU has its physical headquarters at the University of Pretoria, where scholars like Prof. Danie Prinsloo and Prof. Elsabé Taljard have made significant strides into the lexicography of African languages, in particular Northern Sotho (apart from working on many other themes in applied linguistics and African languages). Such efforts have received additional impetus with regard to isiNdebele at the University of South Africa (UNISA), also physically based in Pretoria. Under the last two Chairpersons of the Department of African Languages, Prof. Sonja Bosch and Prof. Pinky Phaahla, more attention has been dedicated to isiNdebele. Among the lecturers and researchers recruited to the African Languages Department at UNISA are Dr Johanna Malobola-Ndlovu, Ms Nomsebenzi Malele and Mr Peter Mabena, all of whom have followed our work and assisted us on numerous occasions. Mr Mabena has collaborated very closely with our project and has also been actively involved in the HALS activities in Helsinki, where he joined us for in-depth research into the conceptual

architecture of isiNdebele. We benefitted greatly from his constant high level of precision and concentration during several weeks away from his usual work. We also need to thank his employer, UNISA, for granting the necessary research leave during his visit.

Upon our arrival in Pretoria, two short seminars were organised at both UNISA and the University of Pretoria. We would like to thank in particular Sonja Bosch, Chris van Vuuren and their teams at UNISA, as well as Danie Prinsloo, Elsabé Taljard and Sponono Mahlangu (University of Pretoria) for their effort and the insightful talks they offered. Towards the end of our field trip, Prof. Anne-Marie Beukes and Prof. Marné Pienaar (University of Johannesburg) arranged for a visit to the Black Afrikaans-speaking community in Onverwacht, in the vicinity of Cullinan (Gauteng). While its residents are not speakers of isiNdebele, they are neighbours to the Ndebele-speaking communities in the Mpumalanga-Gauteng border area. Their experiences of building linguistic identities against the backdrop of the complex South African setting illustrate how cultural and linguistic affiliation is more than an incidental feature. We are grateful to both of them, as well as to Ms Patricia Machobane, our local host in Onverwacht. We would also like to thank Prof. Matthias Brenzinger (at the time based at the University of Cape Town) and Dr Sheena Shah (then at SOAS, London), as well as Dr Eva-Marie Bloom Ström (then at Rhodes University, Grahamstown) for accompanying us during our visit to South African in May 2016. We benefitted from their expertise in field linguistics, language documentation and description in the South African context and are very grateful to these three colleagues.

Our research trip took us to two different areas, one in the Limpopo province, the other in Mpumalanga. In Limpopo, we visited Mokopane (Sindebele: ka Mungombani, formerly Potgietersrus) and various rural settlements in the Mokopane area as well as Ga-Mashashane (Sindebele: ka Mashashane) and Ga-Maraba (Sindebele: ka Maraba; formerly also known as Kalkspruit). Our initial contact with the Mandebele community in Limpopo was established through Prof. Chris van Vuuren, who directed us to Ms Maggie Siko Lebelo. She arranged for us to meet with Sindebele speakers in Mokopane for the first time in November 2015 and put us in contact with Musa Lebelo, who helped us during the first visits. Without their help, this line of research would have simply not happened. We are extremely grateful to both of them. Like Musa Lebelo, Mimi Masango (Tshwane University of Technology, Soshanguve) joined our research excursion in May 2016. Their help as translators, mediators, and coordinators of various activities has been invaluable. Jerry Simon Malebana from Mokopane also took it upon himself to assist us in many different ways during the field excursion and later. He spent six weeks in Finland assisting with the

analyses of the Sindebele data in spring 2017. We were very lucky to have all three in our team. Thank you.

In Mokopane (ka Mungombani), including the rural areas in its vicinity such as Mosesetjane, Bhabha Frans Makhafola (Sindebele: Makhafula) Lesetja and Bhabha Kenneth Madimetja Kolotsi (Sindebele: Ngoloti) were most helpful in arranging for a welcoming and functional setting for our stay in Limpopo. They were our first contact point to the Sindebele-speaking community: through them we entered into contact with the Mandebele National Organisation (MANO) ahead of our visit. We had the pleasure to work with many of them, from different areas. Among those based in the Mokopane area we would like to thank – in addition to our hosts Frans Makhafola Lesetja and Kenneth Madimetja Ngoloti – the following people: Bhabha Mmadi Alfred Kekana (Sindebele: Gegana) Bhabha Lesibana Lamola (Sindebele: Lusibana Lamula), as well as Sello Jonas Kekana (Sindebele: Gegana) and Katlego Emmanuel Ledwaba. They helped in different roles, as consultants, interpreters, by introducing us to the traditional authorities, and by connecting us to many of the residents in the rural Mokopane areas.

Members of MANO residing in Ga-Mashashane/ka Mashashane were equally active and supportive. They availed themselves for interviews and introduced us to members of the local Sindebele-speaking community. We express our sincere thanks to Ms Ramasela Phillipine Ledwaba, Nne Peggy Mogopa Mokone (Sindebele: Munguni), Bhabha Mfundisi Peter Ledwaba, Bhabha Mpho Moses Mathatho, Bhabha Malose (Sindebele: Malusi) Hosea Ledwaba, and Bhabha Gwangwa Malose (Malusi) Patrick. In addition to their work as direct language consultants, they put us in contact with many further speakers of Sindebele in ka Mashashane after an introduction to the local traditional authorities. We appreciate all these people's help and interest.

The third settlement area, Ga-Maraba/ka Maraba completed the range of our visit to the community of Sindebele speakers in the Limpopo province. As with the previous sites, we are grateful to the traditional authorities at the royal residence for receiving us and lending logistical support. Bhabha Lazarus Malose Mothoa (Sindebele: Malusi Muthwa) and Bhabha Lesibana Edwin Ledwaba deserve our sincere thanks for their collaboration and their key role in bringing together an impressive group of Sindebele-speaking residents of Ga-Maraba/ka Maraba.

We had the opportunity to speak to an impressive number of residents in these three areas. All of them have contributed in an important way to the research presented here. We owe them a big thank you, even though we cannot name every single person here individually. For their particular support with further material, deep insight into the history of Sindebele activism in the past and/or logistical support, we would like mention to Bhabha Dr Shashi Johannes

Ledwaba and Bhabha Ndile Joseph Ledwaba (Ga-Mashashane/ka Mashashane) as well as Bhabha Malose Harry Ledwaba (Mokopane/Mungombani).

The other principal area we visited was in westernmost Mpumalanga. We visited Emthambothini, Siyabuswa, and Thabana. We would like to thank in the first place Thumbile Cultural Heritage Projects, a small company based in Emthambothini, specialising in the design and construction of Ndebele homesteads and assisting higher institutions of learning globally when they want to undertake research in South Africa. The company is responsible for the design and construction of traditional Ndebele homesteads within South Africa and abroad, implementing Ndebele material culture in museums, cultural villages, and universities locally and globally. Our two main hosts in Emthambothini were Mr Godfrey Thubana and Ms Esther Mahlangu. Thank you for receiving us as your guests.

We visited many households in Emthambothini, Siyabuswa, and Thabana. Our interactions with members of the local communities were made possible by the help in directing and accompanying us, as well as the interpreting that we received from several people: Ms Leah Thubana, Mr Mthokozisi Mahlangu, Mr Sizi Ndala, Ms Busisiwe Thubana, Ms Nomzamo Jiyana, Ms Zanele Sithole, Mr Mduduzi Mahlangu, and Mr Nkosinathi Sindane deserve special thanks for this, and for being willing to be interviewed and recorded themselves. For logistic support and catering we would also like to express our thanks to Ms Sibongile Sithole and Ms Nokuphila Mahlangu.

We extend our gratitude to the Head of the Thubana family, Mr Thumbile John Thubana, and in fact to the entire family for lending general support and hosting researchers on various occasions, including the entire group during the three weeks in May 2016. It was at the home of the Thubana family that Thumbile Cultural and Heritage Projects sponsored and organised an official function: a reception on the occasion of our visit. It was an honour to attend the cultural performances and to be able to meet three guests of honour who were kind enough to address us on the occasion: Ms Nomsa Mtsweni, at the time MEC (Member of the Executive Council) for Social Development of the Mpumalanga Province; Ms Ruth Mathabe, then Mayor of the Dr J S Moroka Municipality; and Ms Esther Mahlangu, whose art has made Ndebele culture known internationally. We warmly thank the three of them as well as Mr Mikirosh Skhosana who led us through the event as the master of ceremony. Also present was Mr Memento Skhosana, a local businessman who organised an enjoyable evening for us at Memento's lifestyle, a local club he owns and runs in Kameelrivier.

In addition to all those mentioned thus far, numerous people have assisted us by answering our many questions, by being willing to be interviewed, and by participating in various research activities. We visited many households and

were warmly received in Emthambothini, Thabana, and Siyabuswa. We express our sincere gratitude to all of them; even if we cannot mention every individual person's name, we appreciate the help in every single instance.

In addition to the Ndebele project team (Aunio, Crane, Fleisch, Schulz), the group of participants from the University of Helsinki included three other staff members, Riho Grünthal, Riikka Länsisalmi, and Matti Miestamo, as well as 14 BA, MA, and PhD students: Heini Arjava, Andrei Dumitrescu, Kati Helenius, Jaakko Helke, Sami Honkasalo, Isalee Jallow, Markus Juutinen, Maikki Järvi, Jukka Kajala, Antti Laine, Aino Pesonen, Nailya Philippova, Lena Seppinen, and Niina Väisänen. We thank you all for fruitful cooperation during our excursion and afterwards. Ekaterina Gruzdeva and Juha Janhunen unfortunately could not join us in South Africa but were important advisors all along. We also thank the Finnish Oriental society for accepting this volume to *Studia Orientalia* and for the final steps of the publication; the reviewers for their careful reading and their many helpful suggestions and comments; and Thera Crane for language checking.

We are grateful to all the speakers of Sindebele and isiNdebele for sharing the insights of their languages with us. We have learned a lot and hope this work has sparked the interest of the academic community in these languages. At the same time, it is our hope that the communities will remain equally enthusiastic about their languages in the future, so that the South Africa Ndebele varieties may thrive for a long time to come.

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