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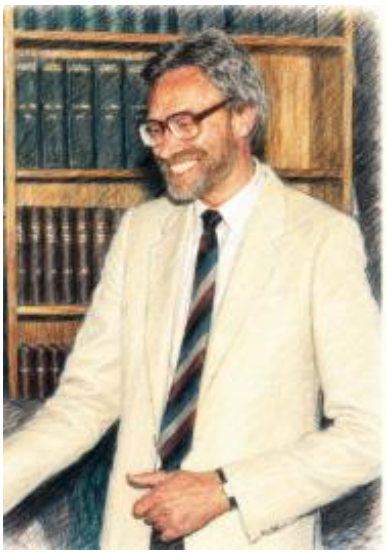
J.C.M.D. du Plessis
1940 – 2026



Met die heengaan van dr. Johan du Plessis op 7 April 2026 het die Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT) 'n gewaardeerde oudkollega en vriend verloor wat sy lewe aan dié instelling gewy het.

Dr. Johannes Christiaan Marthinus Daniël du Plessis begin sy loopbaan by die WAT met sy aanstelling as tegniese assistent op 1 Julie 1963. Dit was veral gedurende dié tyd dat hy die WAT-biblioteek soos die palm van sy hand sou leer ken, 'n vaardigheid wat hom in staat sou stel om die juiste sitaat en mees obskure bron vinnig en moeiteloos te vind. Sy liefde vir en kennis van die letterkunde het ook hiertoe meegehelp. Op 1 Februarie 1965 word by bevorder tot mederedakteur en in dieselfde jaar behaal hy sy MA-graad met die tesis *Tradisie en vernuwing in die Afrikaanse verhalende prosa*. Hy word op 1 Oktober 1981 tot senior mederedakteur bevorder en verwerf in 1985 sy doktorsgraad met die proefskrif *Die nie-pikareske pikaro: 'n strukturalistiese ondersoek na die pikareske elemente in Van Bruggen se Ampietrilogie*. Met ingang Januarie 1985 word hy as assistenthoofredakteur van die WAT aangestel vir 'n proeftydperk van twee jaar en op 1 Januarie 1987 word sy permanente aanstelling bekragtig. In 1990 is 'n nuwe organisasie- en personeelstruktuur by die WAT geïmplementeer en op 31 Desember word hy die eerste eindredakteur van die WAT. Met dié pos aanvaar hy verantwoordelik vir die funksionele beplanning van en beheer oor die

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redaksionele bewerking en manuskripontwikkeling, 'n grootse taak wat hy met onderskeiding verrig het.

Hy sal veral onthou word vir sy skerp intellek, sy noulettende aandag aan besonderhede, sy vermoë om betekenis uiters akkuraat te verwoord en die gawe om altyd die regte sitate vir die betrokke betekenisonderskeiding te vind. Sy vertroudheid met die WAT se kaartmateriaal het meegehelp dat hy enige handskrif kon ontsyfer en met skrapse inligting die korrekte bron kon opspoor. Die mederedakteurs wat onder sy leiding gewerk het, kan getuig van die deeglike herskrywing en bywerking van manuskrip wat in sy onberispelike handskrif op papierkopieë geskied het. Onder sy bekwame redaksionele leiding verskyn dele IX, X en XI, dikwels op die laaste nippertjie, maar altyd fyn afgerond en binne die tydsraamwerk soos vereis, al het dit beteken dat hy dikwels letterlik dag en nag op kantoor moes deurbring.

In 1997 neem dr. Du Plessis die redakteurskap van die internasionale vaktydskrif *Lexikos* oor, terwyl hy steeds die veeleisende pos van eindredakteur beklee het. Met sy wetenskaplike benadering, pragmatiese ingesteldheid, nougesetheid en toewyding was hy instrumenteel daarin om van *Lexikos* die internasionaal gerekende publikasie te maak wat dit vandag is. In die proses het hy uitvoering gegee aan die strewe om van *Lexikos* 'n voertuig vir die leksikografiese gesprek tussen leksikograaf en taalkundige op 'n wetenskaplike vlak te maak. Hy het nie alleen erkende en ervare wetenskaplikes as gespreksgenote betrek nie, maar ook baie moeite gedoen om studente en leksikografie te begelei om met groter vrymoedigheid aan die gesprek deel te neem. Hier is dit noemenswaardig dat hy talle leksikografiestudente van veral Gaboen, asook jong of onervare leksikografie van die Nasionale Leksikografie-Eenhede aangemoedig en ondersteun het om afgeronde, wetenskaplike artikels oor die leksikografie te skryf. Ná sy aftrede as eindredakteur op 31 Desember 2000 het hy nog vir 10 jaar tot in 2010 as redakteur van *Lexikos* aangebly en steeds feitlik elke dag op kantoor deurgebring. Vir sy merkwaardige toewyding aan die vak en praktyk, sowel as vir sy langtermyndiens as hoofredakteur van *Lexikos*, is hy in Julie 2012 vereer deur die African Association for Lexicography met 'n erelidmaatskap.

Benewens *Lexikos* was hy ook vir ander publikasies verantwoordelik. Hy was naamlik redakteur van *Die leksikograaf as eksegeet*, 'n werk oor die lewe, opstelle en lesings van dr. F.J. Snijman, 'n voormalige hoofredakteur van die WAT, wat in 1995 as deel van die AFRILEX-reeks gepubliseer is. Sy uittrede as redakteur van *Lexikos* het nie die einde van sy betrokkenheid by die WAT beteken nie. Hy het voortgegaan met leksikografiese navorsing en die laaste artikel wat hy geskryf het, was *C. Louis Leipoldt se bydrae tot die materiaalversameling van J.J. Smith se Afrikaanse standaardwoordeboek*. Dit is gepubliseer in 'n huldigingsbundel vir dr. Willem Botha, die voorganger van die huidige hoofredakteur van die WAT. Die bundel het in 2022 as 'n spesiale uitgawe van *Lexikos* verskyn.

Dr. Du Plessis is op 7 April 2026, presies 'n maand voor die amptelike WAT100-viering, in die ouderdom van 85 jaar oorlede nadat hy nog enkele dae tevore op kantoor was. Sy nalatenskap strek veel verder as die WAT self en vir

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die reusebydrae wat hy tot die veld van die Leksikografie gemaak het, maar ook vir sy belangstelling in en empatie met sy kollegas en medemens sal hy met dankbaarheid en deernis onthou word.

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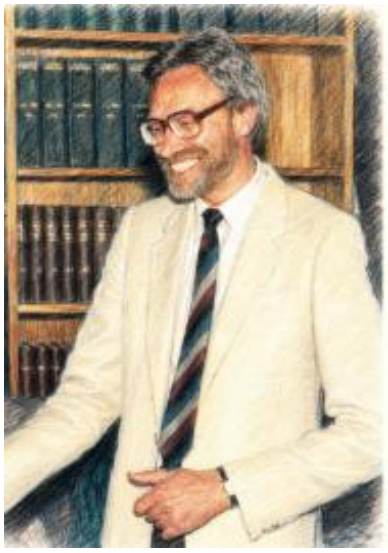

With the passing of Dr Johan du Plessis on 7 April 2026, the Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language, WAT) lost an esteemed colleague and friend that devoted his life to this institution.

Dr Johannes Christiaan Marthinus Daniël du Plessis began his career at the WAT as technical assistant on 1 July 1963. It was during this time that he got to know the WAT's library like the back of his hand — a skill that would ultimately allow him to find the correct citation quickly and effortlessly in the most obscure source. His love for and knowledge of literature also helped in this regard. Dr Du Plessis was promoted to co-editor on 1 February 1965 and in the same year he completed his master's degree with the thesis *Tradisie en vernuwing in die Afrikaanse verhalende prosa* (Tradition and renewal in Afrikaans fiction). He is promoted to senior co-editor on 1 October 1981, and in 1985 obtains his doctorate with the dissertation *Die nie-pikareske pikaro: 'n strukturalistiese ondersoek na die pikareske elemente in Van Bruggen se Ampietrilogie* (The nonpicaresque picaro: a structural analysis of the picaresque elements in Van Bruggen's Ampie trilogy). In January 1985 he was appointed as assistant editor-in-chief for a probationary period of two years. The appointment was made permanent on 1 January 1987. In 1990 a new organisational and personnel structure was implemented at the WAT, and on 31 December of that year he became the first end-editor of the WAT. With this position he took on the

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added responsibility of the functional planning and management of editorial work and manuscript development, an important task that he executed with distinction.

He will especially be remembered for his sharp intellect, careful attention to detail, his ability to express meaning extremely accurately, and for the gift of always finding the right citations for a particular sense. His familiarity with the WAT's index card collection ensured that he could decipher any handwriting and find the correct source with minimal information. Co-editors that worked under his guidance, can attest to his thoroughly made revisions and updates, provided in immaculate handwriting no less, on paper copies of their manuscript. Under his capable editorial leadership three volumes of the WAT, namely IX, X and XI, were published, usually at the last minute but always exquisitely polished and within the required deadline — even if it meant he had to literally work all day and night.

In 1997 Dr Du Plessis was appointed as editor of the journal *Lexikos*, while still occupying the tasking position as end-editor. His scientific approach, pragmatic mindset, meticulousness and dedication were instrumental in making *Lexikos* the acclaimed international publication it is today. In the process, he gave effect to the pursuit of making *Lexikos* a vehicle for the lexicographical discourse between lexicographer and linguist at a scientific level. Not only did he invite established and experienced academics into the fold, but he also worked tirelessly to get students and lexicographers to take part liberally and confidently in lexicographic discourse. It is worth noting that he encouraged and supported many students of lexicography, especially from Gabon, as well as inexperienced lexicographers from the National Lexicography Units to submit articles for *Lexikos*. After his retirement as end-editor on 31 December 2000 he spent another 10 years as editor of *Lexikos.* For his remarkable commitment to the discipline and practice, as well as for his longstanding service to *Lexikos*, the African Association for Lexicography awarded him with an honorary membership.

Besides *Lexikos* he was also responsible for other publications. He was editor of *Die leksikograaf as eksegeet* (The lexicographer as exegete), a collection of works, essays, and lectures of Dr F.J. Snijman, a former editor-in-chief of the WAT, which was published in 1995 as part of the AFRILEX-series. His retirement as editor of *Lexikos* did not end his involvement at the WAT. He continued with lexicographical research and his last contribution, *C. Louis Leipoldt se bydrae tot die materiaalversameling van J.J. Smith se Afrikaanse standaardwoordeboek* (C. Louis Leipoldt's contribution to the material collection of J.J. Smith's Afrikaans desk dictionary), was published in 2022 in the *Festschrift* for Dr Willem Botha, the predecessor of the WAT's current editor-in-chief.

Dr Du Plessis passed away on 7 April 2026 at 85 years old, precisely a month before the WAT would officially celebrate its centenary, and a few days after he was still busy working in his office. His legacy extends far beyond the WAT and his lasting contributions to the field of Lexicography. He will also be

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remembered with gratitude and affection for the interest he took in his colleagues and fellow human beings, and for the empathy he showed towards them.

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