



*Dr J.C.M.D. du Plessis — Honorary Member of AFRILEX since July 2012*

### **Laudatio for Dr Johan du Plessis (read by the AFRILEX President at the 17<sup>th</sup> AGM)**

I would like to start by quoting a section from our Constitution, Section E, point (11):

“Honorary membership can be bestowed by the Board upon persons who have made outstanding contributions to lexicography and the Association. Any member of the Association can nominate a person for honorary membership by submitting a detailed motivation to the Board. Honorary members are exempted from the payment of membership fees. Honorary members will be acknowledged where applicable in publications of the Association such as newsletters, conference programmes and proceedings as well as on the website of the Association.”

— Afrilex Constitution | Adopted: 14 July 1995 (1st AGM), Amended: 9 July 2002 (7th AGM) & 6 July 2011 (16th AGM)

We currently have two Honorary Members, **Prof A.C. Nkabinde**, since July 2002, and **Prof Rufus Gouws**, since July 2010. At the Afrilex Board Meeting last September I tabled a proposal to also confer this honour to a third member of our Association. The Board unanimously accepted my proposal, and I would now like to reveal the identity of our new Honorary Member.

This person is, of course, **Dr. Johan du Plessis**, the editor of *Lexikos* for no less than fourteen of the first twenty years of our journal, from Volume 7 in 1997 until Volume 20 in 2010, an amazingly long tenure. His tenure was not only exceptional in terms of length, but especially in terms of quality. As we have witnessed, Johan and the journal went from strength to strength with each new volume. With his last volume, Volume 20 in 2010, Johan put a magnificent capstone to an outstanding series. Weighing in at 800 pages, Johan's capstone simply outgrew the concept of a single journal issue,

catapulting it to the most valued library shelves, where it now rubs shoulders with the heftiest of dictionaries — quite appropriate for our discipline.

*Lexikos* is not the journal of Afrilex — as it attracts contributions from all over the world, with the best only being published following, for each, a rigorous blind adjudication process by at least two referees — but it is the *favoured outlet* and as such mouthpiece of the members of Afrilex. For fourteen years Johan has supervised the conversion from mere manuscripts to articles that were often very nearly perfect. Such aspects did not go unnoticed, and it is no doubt thanks to the good submissions, improved with the help of Johan's extensive network of adjudicators, and a timely editorial process, that *Lexikos* was selected, as of Volume 15 in 2005, for inclusion in the databases of the Thomson Reuters Web of Science Citation Index.

When Johan accepted the editorship of *Lexikos* in 1997, he was still holding the demanding position of Final Editor at the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal*. As Dr. Willem Willem has pointed out: "Suddenly he no longer had office hours: he was more or less permanently at the office." After his retirement in 2000 he stayed on as editor for a further ten years, spending the equivalent of six months of every year on the production of a volume of *Lexikos*. He went to extraordinary lengths to help create a true culture of scientific reporting on lexicography in Africa. In addition to the painstaking guidance he offered to new entrants, helping them through the numerous rewritings of their contributions, in 2003 Johan also launched the "*Lexikos* encouragement prize for scholarly writing". In his own words, the aim of this prize was:

"To encourage students in lexicography and young lexicographers to conduct significant research in their field of study, and to raise the standard of scholarly writing in the field of lexicography. Competing for the prize therefore takes the form of a scientific article."

— Johan du Plessis (2003, from a leaflet included with *Lexikos* 13)

Johan also put his money where his heart was, and further included prize money for the winners.

In conclusion, then, one can confidently state that through the unconditional devotion to his job, Johan not only raised the prestige of *Lexikos* and thus Afrilex, but also of lexicography as an academic discipline as a whole. To Dr Johan du Plessis— valued colleague and dear friend — our sincerest gratitude is extended, and an Honorary Membership of Afrilex is highly due.