The Khoisan languages of southern Africa: a brief introduction.

Dr Menán du Plessis,
Research Associate in the Dept of Linguistics, Stellenbosch University
Program

• Our eight workshops will cover general aspects of the typology of the three main families collectively referred to as southern African Khoisan. By the end of this short course, participants should have a good idea of the diversity of the languages commonly referred to under the umbrella term ‘Khoisan’.

• The presentations will include copious amounts of data to illustrate aspects of the phonetics, morphology and syntax of these little-known and for the most part highly endangered African languages.
Program

• We will also touch on their present-day status and community efforts at conservation and revitalization.

• We will note various controversial issues (theoretical linguistics) as well as some thorny topics in current documentary linguistics.

• Lastly, and as a bonus, participants should by the end of the series be able to produce at least some of the clicks for which these languages are famous!
Program

Workshop 1 (Fri): Introduction
Workshop 2 (Tues): KHOE – Khoekhoe
Workshop 3 (Fri): KHOE – Kalahari
Workshop 4 (Tues): JU (and †’Amkoe?)
Workshop 5 (Fri): TUU - Taa
Workshop 6 (Tues): TUU – !Ui

NB: Assessment exercise should be manageable at this point.

Workshop 7 (Fri): Current issues in documentary linguistics
Workshop 8: Review.
Course resources and evaluation

• **Resources (all available via Canvas)**
  Handouts
  Readings*

• **Assessment (on Canvas)**
  Data-based assignment

* You may like to consult Rainer Vossen (ed.), *The Khoesan Languages* (Routledge, 2013).
Workshop 1: Introduction

- African context
- Terminology and nomenclature
- Distribution and status
- Diversity of families
- A few notes on tones, vowel features and clicks
Africa: home to c. 2000 languages!

Afroasiatic shown in blue.
Afroasiatic

Berber
Chadic
Egyptian
Cushitic
Omotic
Semitic

Map Gutman and Avanzati (2013)
Nilo-Saharan shown in yellow.
Nilo-Saharan

Map from Britannica.
Malayo-Polynesian!

Map from SIL Ethnologue.
Warning: Some people today, especially in South Africa, may find the internationally used term ‘Bantu’ offensive.

• Note that the term was proposed by Wilhelm Bleek in 1862 as the name for a vast family of related languages.

• The Bantu languages form just one division of one branch (Benue-Congo) of the Niger-Congo superfamily.

• An alternative term occasionally used for them is ‘Niger-Congo B’. A few linguists have tried using Kintu or Sintu, but there has been little uptake.
‘Khoisan’ shown in green.
‘Khoisan’

Hadza
Sandawe
JU (+ †’Amkoe ~ E. †Hoan?)
TUU (!Ui-Taa)
KHOE (+ Kwadi?)

**NB:** The three main families of southern Africa are thought by most linguists to be unrelated.
Terminology (2)

• The term ‘Khoisan’ is inherited from anthropology, and is used by linguists as a convenient umbrella term for three or four different language groups.

• There is ongoing debate as to whether these groups are even related to one another! Use of the convenient collective term ‘Khoisan’ does not imply any relatedness of the families subsumed under it. Some linguists believe that an areal scenario of contact and diffusion may account for the indisputable similarities occasionally observed across the southern groups.

• Some linguists include two isolate east African languages, Hadza and Sandawe, and also the extinct Angolan language Kwadi as part of a wider Khoisan grouping, or ‘macro-Khoisan’. While there are a few tantalizing minor resemblances between some—but not all—of these languages, there is no conventional evidence to support the idea of an actual relationship between any of them.
Distribution: Hadza, Sandawe, Kwadi
Distribution: KHOE
Distribution: JU and Taa (TUU)

Where are the !Ui (TUU) languages?
Terminology (3)

• The term ‘San’ is used today by some archaeologists, anthropologists and historians as an alternative to ‘Bushman’. It is simply a generic term for hunter-gatherer communities, and does not refer to any family of languages. (There is no such thing as a ‘San language!’)

• Some speakers of KHoe languages were traditionally hunter-gatherers.

• Other speakers of KHoe languages—especially the Khoi (or Khoikhoi) of South Africa—were herders, and were in the past referred to by various names that are today considered deeply offensive.

Warning: you may encounter some derogatory names in older literature. These can be very hurtful, but try to understand the historical context in which they were used.
Status of Khoisan languages today

• All are endangered to some degree.
• Some have a few thousand speakers.
• Some have fewer than ten – or even just one or two speakers left.
• A few have well developed orthographies.
• Only one enjoys official status (Namibian Khoekhoe, aka Khoekhoegowab, formerly Nama-Dama).
Status of Khoisan languages in South Africa today

• About 2000 senior citizens in the far Northern Cape still speak Nama (Khoekhoe KHoe) in addition to Afrikaans. In recent years the language has been introduced into a few primary schools in the region, and a younger generation is now beginning to learn the language again.

• It was discovered during the 1990s that about two dozen elderly members of the ✶Khomani San still remembered some !Nuu (!Ui), though they mainly spoke Nama and Afrikaans. Sustained efforts have been made over the past decade and a half to document this language, but almost all of these elders have now passed away.

• It was discovered in 2007 that one or two elderly people still remembered some Kora (Khoekhoe KHoe), although they mainly spoke Afrikaans.
Diversity of the Khoisan languages: The **KHOE** family

NB: Some linguists believe that the extinct Kwadi of Angola was related to the KHOE languages, and these linguists propose a higher-order entity ‘Khoe-Kwadi’.

In this course we will be looking at:

- Specific typological features of the KHOE family as a whole.
- Features that distinguish languages of the Kalahari branch from those of the Khoekhoe branch.
Diversity of the Khoesan languages: The **JU** and **TUU** families

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 1.3. The JU and TUU (!Ui-Taa) groups of Southern African Khoisan languages.**

**NB:** Some linguists believe that EasternǂHoan (akaǂ’Amkoe) is related to the JU languages, and they propose a higher-order entity Kx’a.

In this course we will be looking (in very broad terms) at:

- The main typological features that distinguish the JU and TUU families from each other.
- The main features that distinguish both from KHOE.
Topics we have covered so far

• The main mega-groupings of African languages.
• Aspects of terminology.
• Distribution and status of Khoisan languages.
• Diversity of Khoisan families: KHOE, JU, TUU.
Current debates in Khoisan linguistics

• A proposed connection between the JU group and the previously unplaced Ḗ’Amkoe (aka E. Ḗ’Hoan).

• Clicks as clusters vs clicks as complex unitary segments.

• Click loss vs click emergence across the KHOE spectrum.

• Proposed external relationships involving the KHOE group and the Angolan isolate, Kwadi; and ‘Khoe-Kwadi’ and Sandawe.

• Areal scenarios for Khoisan.

• Can the complex predicates found in Khoisan languages be analysed as SVCs? Perhaps only in some cases?

Kudu, xaib in Nama, n!hoan in Juǀ’hoan, dòõ-ka in !Xoon
A brief look at clicks, tones and vowel features

• The use of **click consonants** is the typological feature that most sharply distinguishes Khoisan languages from other African languages. A few other African languages (such as Zulu or Dahalo) also make use of clicks, but it is clear that these languages belong to other families (in the case of the examples above, Nguni Bantu and Cushitic Afroasiatic respectively).

• Like many other languages of Africa, the Khoisan languages make use of **semantically contrastive lexical tone melodies**.

• Khoisan languages also make contrastive use of certain **vowel features**, such as nasalisation, glottalisation, breathy-voicing and pharyngealisation.
Wilfrid Haacke gives the following (unusual) set of six Nama words that are distinguished almost exclusively by tone:

- !om [LL] ‘butt, push’
- !oms [LH] ‘udder’
- !om [LL] ‘force exit from burrow’
- !om [HL] ‘remove thorn; coagulate’
- !om [LHˈ] ‘pollard (cut back a tree)’
- !oms [HˈH] ‘fist’
| !khaib [!xəip, LH’] | ‘cold’ |
| !khaib [!xəip, H’H] | ‘head-cloth, hat’ |
| !khaib [!xəip, HL] | ‘area, region’ |
| !kharu [!xaru, LH’] | ‘pass, go by’ |
| !kharu [!xaru, HL] | ‘snore, purr, grunt’ |
| !khū [!xuu, LH’] | ‘pound, crush’ |
| !khū [!xuu, H’H] | ‘come up (of fog, mist); cover over’ |
| !khū [!xuu, LL] | ‘bec, rich/wealthy’ |
| !nāb [n!aap, L,H] | ‘belly, stomach, innards’ |
| !nāb [n!aap, L,L] | ‘blaze (as on animal’s face)’ |

Niklaas Fredericks (note Nama pronunciation of ‘ai’).
A few notes on vowel features

āb [ʔaap, HL]  ‘a drink’  long
âb [ʔaap, L,H]  ‘younger brother’  nasalised

†nū [n̥uu, L,L]  ‘black’  long
†nû [n̥̊u, H,H]  ‘sit down’  nasalised
†’ū [†’u, LH]  ‘eat’  nasalised
A few initial notes on clicks

The production of click consonants can be regarded as a further manner, since these sounds are essentially plosives delivered by the release of a special type of closure – namely one that involves a broader stopping than usual, spanning a forward (anterior) and a rear (posterior) place of articulation. It is the place of the anterior closure that determines the characterisation of the click as either front (bilabial) or central (dental, alveolar lateral, (post)alveolar, or palato-alveolar). Since the tongue starts to pull away from the roof of the mouth while the two closures are both still in place, this results in a fleeting rarefaction of the air trapped within the momentarily enclosed but widening space. The final snapping of the anterior seal, which is what creates the click sound, is associated with an influx of air through the mouth to correct the minute pressure imbalance. This is why clicks are described as ingressive sounds.

(Diagram by Arcadian (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons. Some labels have been added.)
A few initial notes on clicks

Although the second closure was for many decades assumed to be velar (so that clicks were sometimes referred to as ‘velaric ingressives’), it is now known that for most of the clicks, in most environments, the rear closure is in real terms more typically uvular. (The difference between velar and post-velar closures is not phonologically significant.) Because of the technical inaccuracy of the term ‘velar’, and since the mechanism responsible for the ingress of air is the downward movement of the tongue, some linguists now suggest that clicks are better described as lingual ingressives.
A few initial notes on clicks

- In the case of simple clicks, the two closures are released with near simultaneity, so that there is an inaudible release of the rear closure, and any accompanying elaborations, such as voicing, aspiration or ejection, closely resemble features that may be associated with conventional egressive segments.

- In the case of clicks termed complex, there is a separate and audible release of the rear closure, which delivers a sound based on an ordinary egressive flow of air. This sound is often perceived as a distinct segment, and may give the impression that it is independently characterised by features such as voicing, aspiration or ejection. (Some linguists analyse the clicks of this sub-set as ‘consonant clusters’. Others interpret the releases at two different places as two segued components in the production of a ‘complex but unitary segment’.)

- A further factor is the possibility of prenasalisation, which can occur with either simple or complex clicks, and may be associated with specially adapted types of aspiration and ejection. The nasalisation can continue throughout the production of the click, in which case the click is described as nasalised.
A few initial notes on **clicks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Click name</th>
<th>bilabial</th>
<th>dental</th>
<th>lateral</th>
<th>palato-alveolar</th>
<th>(post)alveolar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IPA symbol and name.</td>
<td>⠎</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘bull’s eye’</td>
<td>‘pipe’</td>
<td>‘double pipe’</td>
<td>‘double-barred pipe’</td>
<td>‘exclamation point’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanised</td>
<td>(pc)</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>tc</td>
<td>q</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The examples of the four basic Khoekhoe clicks below are from Kora (illustrated by Ouma Jacoba Maclear)

ǀamse ‘twice’

ǀamma ‘water’

ǃam ‘kill’

ǂã ‘go in, set (of sun)’ ǂã na soreb ke ‘the sun is setting’

(NB: KHOE languages do not make use of the bilabial click.)
Some possible click ‘accompaniments’

• In much the same way as more conventional segments, clicks may be elaborated by a range of features, including voicing, aspiration and ejection. They may also be prenasalised.

• The elaborations are sometimes referred to as ‘click accompaniments’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accompaniment type</th>
<th>symbol in Namibian Khoekhoe</th>
<th>examples with dental click</th>
<th>meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain</td>
<td>/g = /!/</td>
<td>/gom</td>
<td>‘suck’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ejective</td>
<td>/l = /!/!</td>
<td>/om</td>
<td>‘grow, sprout’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirated:</td>
<td>/h = /!/!/</td>
<td>/hommi</td>
<td>‘heaven, sky’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricated:</td>
<td>/kh = /!/x&quot;, /kx/</td>
<td>/khom</td>
<td>‘feel sorry for, pity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre-)nasalised:</td>
<td>/n = /!/ŋ/</td>
<td>/nom</td>
<td>‘smile, grin, smirk’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our ‘click of the day’

Click of the day: Dental [Ʉ, Nguni c] (the ‘annoyance or pity click’)
Features: None (plain click)
Aspiration (aspirated click)

Once you have mastered the basic dental click, try to make a contrast between a plain and an aspirated form. The following examples are from the Nama variety of Namibian Khoekhoe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gui</th>
<th>[ui, H'H]</th>
<th>‘one’</th>
<th>plain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gam</td>
<td>[am, HL]</td>
<td>‘two’</td>
<td>plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hui</td>
<td>[n]hui, L,L</td>
<td>‘hiss (as snake)’</td>
<td>aspirated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hamì</td>
<td>[ʰ]hamì, H'H</td>
<td>‘gather, collect’</td>
<td>aspirated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reverting to the topic of present day status of Khoisan languages …
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A short documentary clip (12 mins) about the South African Nama communities of the Richtersveld (far Northern Cape).
OR

An account (30 mins) of the Kora documentation project.