

Access granted to earliest languages

HELENA BARNARD

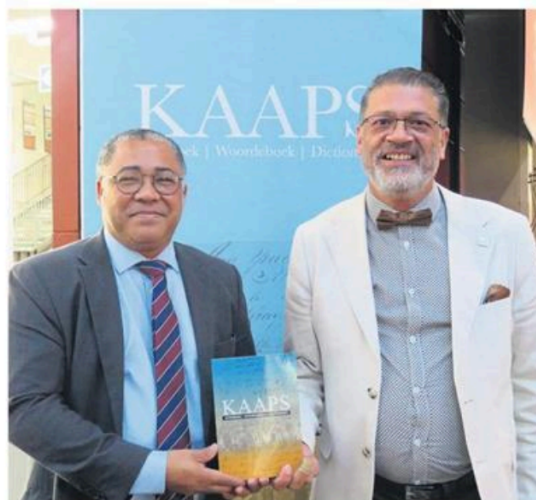
For the first time in history, the slave lingua franca is codified in a dictionary. The *Kaaps Woriboek / Woordeboek / Dictionary* is a historic reference resource that describes the spelling system and development of Kaaps words and provides linguistic and cultural access to one of the oldest languages in South Africa.

"No dictionary is ever completed or perfect, there is so much more that must be added. But Kaaps is a language, and this dictionary is a source that did not exist before," said Dr Theodore Rodrigues at the launch in July at the Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in Kimberley, hosted by its Faculty of Humanities.

Rodrigues is a senior lecturer in the Department of Afrikaans and Theory of Literature at the University of South Africa (Unisa). He was joined by Prof. Quentin Williams, professor of Linguistics in the Linguistics Department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and Prof. Victor Teise, director of the Centre for Creative Writing and African Language at the SPU.

During their conversation with Dr Natalie Smith and Sisca Julius, Williams said in compiling the dictionary, they had to make many decisions, for example whether they were using the words of Adam Small or Nathan Trantraal. Rodrigues added that as editors of the dictionary, they are not the "spelpolisie" and do not aim to standardise Kaaps in the book.

Kaaps started centuries ago on ships when people of many identities and languages were on their way to the Cape. With time, "Kaaps



Prof. Quentin Williams (left) and Dr Theodore Rodrigues at the launch of the Kaaps Woriboek in Kimberley. PHOTO: Helena Barnard

words walk into the voorkamer," and by no means is it a language of a lower standard. It is one of pride, with a unique manifestation.

Williams and Rodrigues shared that a lot of emotion went into the compiling of the book, and that the book is unpacking truth – not hiding, and not pointing fingers. They also emphasised that Kaaps is not only a language spoken in the Cape, but all over the country.

"Do not frown upon Kaaps and its speaker with a specific accent. Let them speak, write, live, grow, flourish, in Kaaps," they remarked, while Rodrigues said he is looking forward to the first Kaaps thesis.

The book can be ordered from shofarbooks.co.za.