

## Documenting language and culture in endangered social practices

### The project and its results

Between 2003 and 2010 research for this project (funded by the DoBeS programme of the Volkswagen Foundation) was carried out under the leadership of Prof. S. Levinson of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen.



Going through the electronic database with ǀAkhoe Hai||om speakers. Maais Goboses, Oahetamas Goboses, and Thomas Widlok

In this period the three main researchers Thomas Widlok, Christian Rapold and Gertie Hoymann compiled the ǀAkhoe Hai||om corpus. The corpus is accessible online (<http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES/projects/akhoe/>) and local copies of representative data samples are also available at the archive of the University of Namibia, the National Archive of Namibia, and at the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) as our partner organizations in Namibia.

The project researchers continue to publish results gained from working with this corpus. Selected joint publications are:

**Rapold, C. and Th. Widlok 2008.** "Dimensions of variability in Northern Khoekhoe language and culture" In: K. Sadr and F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (eds.), *The transition to food production in southern Africa*. *Southern African Humanities* 20:133-161.

**Widlok, Th., C. Rapold, G. Hoymann 2008.** "Multimedia analysis in documentation projects: Kinship, interrogatives and reciprocals in ǀAkhoe Hai||om" In: K. David Harrison, D. S. Rood and A. Dwyer (eds.), *Lessons from documented endangered languages*. (*Typological Studies in Language*, 78). pp. 355-370. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

**Widlok, Th. 2013.** "Hai||om Phonology". "Hai||om Morphology". "Hai||om Syntax". "Hai||om Language Contact". "Hai||om Sociolinguistics". In: R. Vossen (ed.), *The Khoesan Languages*. London: Routledge



Transcribing digitalized video-tapes of everyday conversation. |Khomxa Khoeda Junior Primary School at Mangetti-West (|Gomais). From left to right: Gertie Hoymann, Linda Uises, Mariane Kheimses, Christian Rapold

### The people

There are several thousand Hai||om speakers in northern Namibia but less than 200 ǀAkhoe Hai||om in the Oshikoto region maintain a distinct profile with cultural features such as healing trance dances, intensive use of wild plant and insect food, their own kinship and naming system, frequent storytelling, a landscape-term system of spatial orientation and elaborate sharing practices. Our documentation project includes samples of the broad range of ǀAkhoe Hai||om cultural and linguistic features. It also includes a record of the interaction with people in the field.

**Widlok, Th. (forthcoming)** The Archive Strikes Back: Effects of Online Digital Language Archiving on Research Relations and Property Rights. In: Oral Literature in the Digital Age: Archiving Orality and Connecting with Communities. Available under <http://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/186>

**Widlok, Th. 2009.** "Die elektronische Zukunft der Ethnografie und ihre Gegenwart in der Dokumentation bedrohter Sprachen." In: I. Dietzsch, W. Kaschuba, L. Scholze-Irritz (eds.), *Horizonte ethnografischen Wissens. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*. Berlin: Böhlau, pp. 203-220.



ǀAkhoe Hai||om (grand)mother tongue education: !Gamekhas !Nabaris and her granddaughter |Nabaros

### The link between language and culture

ǀAkhoe Hai||om is a Central Khoisan language and a member of the Khoekhoegowab dialect continuum. Like the other Khoisan languages ǀAkhoe Hai||om has click sounds which are represented in writing by special signs:

| represents the dental click (resembling the fricative sound of disapproval in many languages)

|| represents the lateral click (previously often rendered as k as in the Name Haikom)

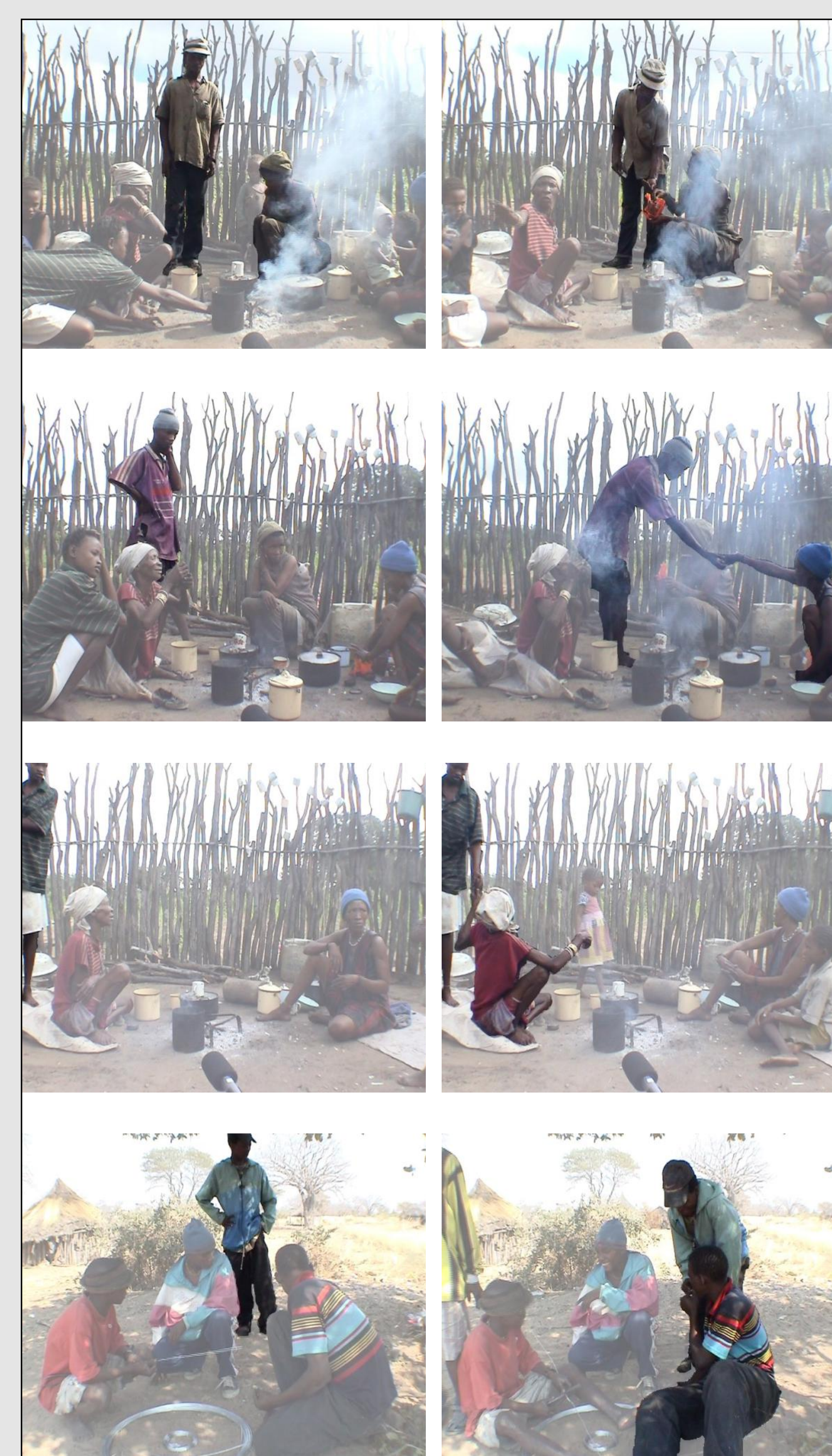
! represents the alveolar click (resembling the sound of a bottle being uncorked)

ǀ represents the palatal click (resembling a clapping sound)

ǀAkhoe Hai||om is threatened not only due to the small size of the community of speakers and a low reputation of the language and its speakers but also because only the other, standardized variants of Khoe-

khoegowab receive the attention of school teachers and language planners.

The unique features of the ǀAkhoe Hai||om language are tightly connected with particular cultural practices such as sharing. Speakers have, for instance, a preference for less coercive and less restrictive question forms which underlines individual autonomy. Requests are not considered face-threatening and people make themselves conspicuously present (part of a practice called ǀgonas) and thus, without verbal interaction, they initiate sharing through a silent demand.



From the video record: a silent ǀgonas demand (left) initiating sharing in response (right)

For more details see:

**Hoymann, G. 2010.** Questions and responses in ǀAkhoe Hai||om. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42:10 p. 2726-2740.

**Rapold, C. 2011.** Semantics of Khoekhoe reciprocal constructions. In: N. Evans, A. Gaby, S. Levinson and A. Majid (eds.), *Reciprocals and semantic typology*. (*Typological Studies in Language*). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. p. 61-74.

**Widlok, Th. 2010.** Sharing as a cultural innovation. In: M. Benz (ed.): *The Principle of Sharing*. Berlin: ex oriente, p. 91-104.

**Widlok, Th. (in press)** Sharing: allowing others to take what is valued. Special Issue of HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

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