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Renowned UCT professor elected Fellow of the British Academy for pioneering linguistic work

Renowned linguist and emeritus professor at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Rajend Mesthrie, has been elected a Fellow of the British Academy, one of the highest honours for scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Mesthrie is part of the 58 UK fellows, 30 international fellows, and four honorary fellows that have been elected to the Fellowship this year.

The new fellows represent a broad spectrum of expertise from the study of 20th-century music and the structural causes of poverty to environmental law and the neuroscience of memory, language and cognition.

Reacting to the announcement, Professor Mesthrie, who is based in [African Studies and Linguistics](#), said: "Although I've never studied in the UK, I have been influenced immensely by British scholarship in general linguistics, sociolinguistics and historical linguistics/philology/history of English. So, I am rather pleased to be recognised in this way by the British Academy. The recognition, however, comes from my lifelong commitment to teaching and research in South Africa in respect of the many linguistic streams that flow through our country."

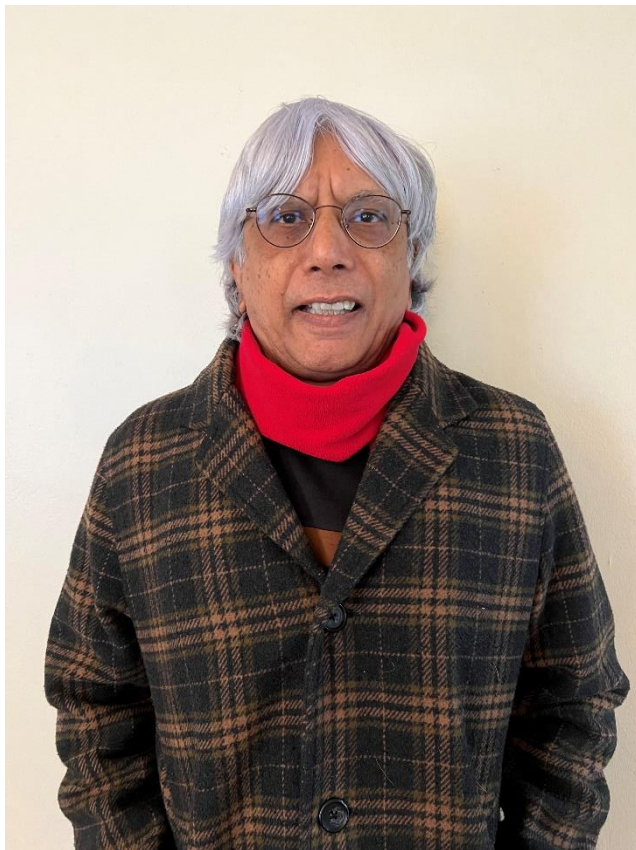
Mesthrie has published extensively on the socio-historical linguistics of Indian languages, African languages, English and Afrikaans in South Africa, plus their multilingual admixtures. At the same time, his work on English as a global language and the sociolinguistics of language contact and variation is widely recognised internationally.

He has also been a community and politically-engaged scholar, leading the transformation of linguistics at UCT to be more responsive to its post-apartheid and African context, without sacrificing the essential and modern tools of the discipline. He is particularly pleased at having recruited, funded and mentored many postgraduate students from all over southern Africa and the rest of the continent.

Mesthrie retired from formal teaching at UCT in 2022 but continues to hold a senior research scholar position. When he retired, a Stanford-Scopus survey placed him in the top 2% of all researchers in all fields and first in Africa in the area of Language-Linguistics-Literature. He also holds honorary life memberships with the Linguistics Society of South Africa and America.

Professor Susan J. Smith PBA, new President of the British Academy, said: "One of my first acts as the incoming President of the British Academy is to welcome this year's newly elected fellows. What a line-up! With specialisms ranging from the neuroscience of memory to the power of music and the structural causes of poverty, they represent the very best of the humanities and social sciences. They bring years of experience, evidence-based arguments and innovative thinking to the profound challenges of our age: managing the economy, enabling democracy, and securing the quality of human life.

"This year, we have increased the number of new fellows by nearly 10% to cover some spaces between disciplines. Champions of research excellence, every new fellow enlarges our capacity to interpret the past, understand the present, and shape resilient, sustainable futures. It is a privilege to extend my warmest congratulations to them all."



Emeritus Professor Rajend Mesthrie

Photo: Supplied

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