

## A TRIBUTE TO PROF DOUGLAS PULLEYBLANK 'ON BECOMING OF AGE'

By Prof. Beban Sammy Chumbow

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Prof. Douglas Pulleyblank, the distinguished Professor of Linguistics and African languages of the University of British Columbia, Canada, a 1983 PhD graduate in Linguistics from the famous University, the MIT Cambridge, Massachusetts USA, is on the threshold of *transition to retirement* after an illustrious career spanning four decades of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination in Linguistics with a wealth of contributions to the growth of Linguistics in the areas of *Generative Phonology: Nonlinear Phonology, Lexical Phonology, Optimality Theory, Grounded Phonology etc* with special expertise in the analysis of tone languages. Douglas is a brilliant scholar, knowledgeable, industrious, committed and devoted to his career in Linguistics, with an endearing and enduring attachment to his students, colleagues and the community of linguists

I believe no one who knows Douglas well is left indifferent, because of his compelling simplicity, attractive empathy, heightened by a profound intellect in interaction. I am privileged to be one of those who knew him well in his early years as a “tender foot scout” searching and asking himself the question every youngster has asked at least once: “what shall I become and what does the future hold for me?”. Today, we know that the uncertain future in the 70s did materialize progressively and became certain over the years for the illustrious Professor of Linguistics. In retrospect, we can look back to the years he worked with us in Ibadan and Ilorin and the advice and counsel I gave him in line of duty as one of his mentors, and how he worked hard and maximized the opportunities he had, to emerge and excel as a brilliant colleague, Professor of linguistics and an internationally recognized icon in Phonology.

### The ILORIN YEARS: INCUBATION AND LAUNCHING PAD

Douglas Pulleyblank's life was apparently providentially carved out and planned with a unique and unusual but profitable trajectory that guided his path to a successful life and career with Ilorin as the incubator and launching pad to the orbit of success and grandeur. I arrived the University of Ilorin, Nigeria from Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA at the invitation of a senior colleague, Prof “Dele Awobuluyi and took up a position in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages as one of the pioneer Lecturers (“faculty”). When I met Douglas in 1977, he had just graduated with a BSc degree in Linguistics from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He was introduced to me by my friend, Prof. Ben Elugbe, his teacher at Ibadan, as a “*brilliantissimo*” who had the unusual distinction of graduating with a **first class Honours degree**. The first remarkable unique element about Douglas to my mind was that Canadians do not come to Africa for a first degree, they normally come for research data for post graduate degrees in Canada or the US. The young man before me was an exception of exceptions! As an

undergraduate, he lived in and out of the hostels at University of Ibadan and went around Nigeria for several years with Nigerian age mates and classmates and they socialized in many ways together. In many ways, Douglas imbibed the local language (Yoruba) and culture and could *code-switch* conveniently between his Canadian English, Nigerian English and Yoruba and that made his integration into the society quite smooth. I was particularly attracted by the fact that he had a **first class degree**, because the University of Ilorin was then a young University, an offspring of the University Ibadan with the ambition of becoming, in the shortest time possible, one of the best universities in the nation and on the continent. We needed to recruit and train 'faculty' and build competent Departments to achieve the university's vision and mission of academic and professional excellence. The rules and regulations at the time authorized us to recruit bright first degrees students with at least **Second Class Upper (Division) degree** as "*Assistant Lecturers- in-Training*". In the British inspired system of degree classification in Nigeria, "first class" degrees are rare, especially in the Social Sciences and Humanities. It is occasionally possible to have a *first class degree* in the so called "exact" sciences like Mathematics, Statistics, Physics and Applied Sciences, etc. but rarely in the Humanities. In fact, Douglas Pulleyblank's degree was the first **first Class degree** in the discipline at the University of Ibadan. (Of course, if a "first class" had to come out in a Faculty of Arts, it is not surprising that it was in Linguistics because Linguistics, the Science of Language is at the frontier of two universes: Pure Science and the Humanities. As the famous linguist, William G Moulton of Princeton University once asserted, "*Linguistics is the most humanistic of the Sciences and the most scientific of the Humanities*". At any rate, Douglas Pulleyblank's first class degree was a unique and attractive distinction and I recommended his recruitment to Professor 'Dele Awobuluyi , Head of our Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages and Dean of the Faculty Arts. By the time the recruitment procedure went through due process, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Professor O. Akinkugbe came out with the innovation that to attract the best graduates in Nigeria and elsewhere to our University for training as potential permanent "tenure-able" faculty, holders of First class degrees could be recruited directly as **Assistant lecturers** (not *Assistant lecturers-in- training* as in other universities) even if they have to undergo training. Predictably, this had the fortunate consequence of nearly all the best brains among the young graduates in the country and beyond taking up appointment in various Faculties and Colleges of the University of Ilorin to avail themselves of the privilege and opportunity of the obvious advantage of a step above their class mates. And so, it came to pass that Doug Pulleyblank was recruited as **Assistant lecturer** in 1977. For two years, we worked closely together. Like all mentors of Assistant Lecturers, we had the responsibility to work with him prepare him for both teaching and subsequent post graduate studies; although it was understood that he had no obligation to become a full time faculty of the University unless he wanted to. I found him quite knowledgeable in the fundamental skills and competences of descriptive Linguistics and analysis (this was the strength of the programme of Ibadan University). It was obvious that he could record, transcribe and analyze any language sufficiently well within the classical (Structuralist) linguistic framework. He was very excited about tonal phenomena which held for him a special interest.

However, our first degree programme in Ilorin was different from the Ibadan programme in that it was centered on Generative Grammar. Undergraduate students had to acquire a knowledge of descriptive linguistics and then move on to Generative Phonology and Generative Syntax and demonstrate fundamental knowledge of the paradigm in a final year *mini-thesis* called “Long Essay” (using either Generative Phonology or Generative Syntax theory to analyze an aspect of a language, preferably a language that is not their mother tongue. (This was not a problem in Nigeria with more than 500 languages most of them without basic linguistic studies at that time). Recall that in those days, most universities, even in the US and Canada, introduced Generative Grammar only in the Graduate School. Generative Grammar was relatively still in its infancy and erroneously considered too complex for undergraduates. So, our University of Ilorin programme was ‘avant-gardist’ in this respect. We deliberately sought to prove a point. This is the context in which Douglas Pulleyblank came to work in Ilorin. Doug taught some basic undergraduate courses in Linguistics but accompanied me to class for the Generative Phonology courses. Given his intellectual background, motivation and hard work, Doug was able to stay ahead of the students **permanently** and helped them to do data analysis exercises (following my lectures), exercises geared to introducing students to various phonological processes of natural language and how they can be analyzed from the vantage point of (Classical) Generative Phonology. I then interacted and discussed any issues arising with him. The idea in my interaction with Doug was to enable him, (given his rich descriptive and analytical competence) see the importance of **theory**. ..to see that what he knew how to do so well, could better be apprehended, comprehended and analyzed with greater insight from the perspective of a theoretical framework (like Generative Phonology) that seeks to go beyond **descriptive adequacy** to (at least) approximate *explanatory adequacy*. He learnt a lot but obviously also read a lot on his own and learnt from other sources and resources. He was always asking interesting questions of the type that ‘betrayed’ a great mind and intellect behind the questions and evidenced a lot of seriousness of purpose on his part. He was particularly interested in tonal phenomena in Yoruba and other African languages. Although I was working on Autosegmental Phonology, (tone, vowel harmony and nasality at the time, resulting later in publications (Chumbow 1982 Ogori Vowel Harmony:An Autosegmental perspective in Linguistic Analysis and Nasality in Ogbeira etc), I never discussed autosegmental phonology with him because I did not want to “confuse” him with many things at a time (although he might have been picking that up on his own, given his search-light mind and mindset!).

Of course, academically and socially we regularly had one-on-one discussions on everything and nothing! We spent time together .....and then came Anne Marie, his wife and we tried to get something for her to do so as to feel at home in Ilorin. As a Canadian medalist in swimming, she was able to serve as a swimming instructor and teacher at the University of Ilorin Primary School..... Then the baby came, Ingrid (who must be a great lady today). It was always a pleasure to carry Ingrid. It was a nice time together as we worked routinely. Doug was sociable and given his Nigerian experience and his Ibadan connection, was at home everywhere and anywhere... especially with the important population of young Assistant lecturers and Assistant Lecturers-in-

training in Ilorin, many of whom were his peers at Ibadan. He was an 'oyibo' (whiteman) with a difference; quite appropriately he was a *naturalized* 'oyibo'!

Then time came for Doug to get into Graduate School and he asked me for suggestions. I first proposed the **University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)** where most of the distinguished linguists and Africanists were at the time and some who were trained at the UCLA were congregating around the Los Angeles area at neighbouring institutions like the **University of Southern California (USC)**. To my mind, he will be at home in Los Angeles, given his ambition and interest in and love of African languages. I mentioned names of many of the distinguished linguists I knew personally at the UCLA and USC and Douglas was quite excited. Then, I also proposed the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** where I knew about everyone of the giants of linguistic theory (from their works only) but knew no one personally (unlike UCLA). The more I mentioned MIT, the more I was convinced, he had to go there in Cambridge Massachusetts instead of Los Angeles. But I may have 'over-sold' Los Angeles and UCLA and Doug was already dreaming of meeting the Africanists whose names and work he had consulted. I had to do some *reverse engineering*. I believe he did apply to both but I insisted on MIT and ended up writing a powerful, objective but perhaps a somewhat emotional recommendation for him. I recall indicating in the recommendation, *inter alia*, that "Douglas Pulleyblank will bring to the MIT Graduate programme a comparative advantage of a depth of knowledge in data elicitation and data analysis of a non-European language and a mastery of tonal processes unequalled by other graduate students of his level" .... " Besides, he had available, data collected by himself and others on various aspects of the Yoruba language and other African languages only waiting to be analyzed within an appropriate theoretical framework to be appropriated from MIT".

I knew, no Professor looking for a good graduate student with whom to venture into the universe of *the unknown* to discover new things and push the frontier of knowledge further, to ensure that the *unknown* becomes part of the *known*, will be indifferent to an application file as rich as that of Douglas Pulleyblank. It worked!

**And so it came to pass** that Doug eventually got both admission and a financial grant for Graduate Studies in Linguistics and left for MIT in 1979 with Anne Marie and Ingrid.

In retrospect, it would appear that for Douglas and his divine trajectory towards an illustrious career in Linguistics, Ilorin was *fore-ordained* as the place and time to consolidate and incubate the Ibadan foundation and to launch him unto the orbit. That is why Anne Marie, the love of his life, had to come to Ilorin and taste of Doug's Nigerian connection so that they could always talk about Nigeria together. Even "la petite" (Ingrid) did not want to be left out of the Nigerian connection and came while they were in Ilorin before they could leave Nigeria!

## DOUGLAS PULLEYBLANK AT MIT: REMINISCENCES

After two years in Cambridge Massachusetts, Douglas had adjusted well to the scientific rigours of the MIT milieu, oscillating between Harvard University and MIT, the two top universities, in order to get the best of two worlds! He worked hard and diligently to impress the faculty in the famous Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT where linguistic theory was made and unmade! He excelled in course work and research. How do I know? Well, I am giving you an eyewitness account!

I went to MIT myself to see how Doug and Anne Marie were faring (in April 1982). I was on a sort of sabbatical leave to Indiana University Bloomington (1981-82) and went to visit them. It was an impressive set up and organization. I was introduced by Doug and met personally with most of his teachers and instructors of his primary area of Phonology. Among others, I recall meeting and interacting with Professors Morris Halle (father of Generative Phonology), Ken Hale and especially Paul Kiparsky. They all praised Douglas as an “excellent student” with a lot of promise. For the discipline. Of course I listened carefully but they were preaching to a convert!

I remember discussing briefly with Paul Kiparsky my work on “*Rule complication as Mechanism of Linguistic Change*” (1974 and 1975) which used Kiparsky’s notions of “opacity” and “paradigm regularization” to explain the relatively unusual phenomenon of **rule complication** in diachronic change (Historical Linguistics). At the end of our exchange on Doug’s work, performance and progress, Paul Kiparsky told me: “If you have any more students like Douglas, we would be pleased to have them at MIT”. I considered that not only a compliment but a tribute to Douglas as well as to our work in Nigeria. I subsequently met Prof. Noam Chomsky (father of Generative Grammar) later, during his Thursday- weekly lectures. It look like they all knew Douglas at MIT! Noam Chomsky had weekly lectures exploring and expounding various putative problematic aspects of the theory he introduced some 25 years earlier, addressing criticisms and integrating useful recommendations, showing how they could be accommodated in the theoretical framework. The exchanges that followed each lecture constituted valuable input to the development of the theory and many of Prof. Chomsky’s publications during that period apparently went through this lecture series and the input from MIT students like Douglas Pulleyblank and many linguists from Europe and elsewhere in the US who regularly took part in the event. The Chomsky Lectures Series was a memorable experience for me, thanks to my visit to Douglas Pulleybank and Anne Marie

Returning to Douglas, he had apparently gone through the avalanche of phonological models available at MIT and chosen to *appropriate* and domesticate Paul Kiparsky’s “Lexical Phonology” model of non-linear phonology released in 1982 as “Lexical Phonology and Morphology” as the framework for his highly innovative PhD Thesis on “Tone in Lexical Phonology” supervised by the guru of Lexical Phonology, Professor Paul Kiparsky himself. The sketch of Lexical Phonology that was developed and circulated by Paul Kiparsky (which many of us had read ) did not have much on tone yet and therefore to extend the frontiers of knowledge, Douglas Pulleyblank undertook *to do justice* to tone with an explanatory account of how tonal phenomena and tonal processes

can be accounted for within the framework of 'Lexical Phonology'. This was done with data drawn from a variety of languages including Yemba (referred to in the literature as "Dschang-Bamileke"), Margi, Tiv, Tonga and especially Yoruba with which he had a first-hand knowledge. Douglas Pulleyblank's 1983 thesis titled "Tone in Lexical Phonology", was quite significant and of crucial importance to the development of phonological theory at the time because, inter alia, it contributed to the credibility and validation of the emergent theory of Lexical Phonology.

I was privileged to be sent a copy of the thesis as soon as it was defended in 1983. On the acknowledgement page, many people are acknowledged. Doug ended that page with a special affectionate acknowledgement of me in the following terms: "*I owe a special debt to Sammy Chumbow, who refused to give me letters of recommendation into Graduate School, unless I applied to MIT*". I had forgotten that I did gently and affectionately 'compel' him to apply to MIT after whetting his appetite for UCLA! Well, mentors can do all kinds of things to achieve results, including *cajoling* and *compelling*. (I think specialists call it the **carrot and the stick method**).

Why did I insist on his going to MIT? Well, because, as mentioned earlier. I knew that what he needed most was a sound mastery of theoretical paradigms for analysis of data that he could readily produce and collect. Of course, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA where I did graduate studies, UCLA and other major Graduate Departments of Linguistics in the US and elsewhere also provide opportunity to acquire the theoretical frameworks; but since most of the current theories we used were generated from MIT, I wanted Doug Pulleyblank to go and drink directly from the source! ... I am pleased Doug appreciated that *in fine*. *His going to MIT* was with the understanding that thereafter, he could reach out to and access all the other sites where African Linguistics was done with the advantage of a sound grounding in a theory. It turned out that this was prophetic or at least providential.

## **LOS ANGELES, HERE WE COME!**

On graduation from MIT, Doug (perhaps still with the latent flame ignited in 1977 for Los Angeles), sought and obtained an Assistant Professor's position at the University of Southern California **in the Los Angeles area** to work with the distinguished phonologist and Africanist, Prof. Larry Hyman!

Given his interest in linguistic and African languages, there was no better place than Los Angeles for Doug Pulleyblank to have started a career where he could valorize and make good the knowledge acquired at the MIT while interacting with and learning from eminent linguists doing research on African languages. It is here at the USC, near UCLA that he was able to consolidate, mature, and revise the content of the thesis into a book (Tone in Lexical Phonology) published in 1986 and used as a major textbook on tone in Graduate School programmes of Linguistics across continents. He collaborated with colleagues and some class mates from MIT to write more books and made very significant contributions to the development of Phonology. He trained a lot of linguists who have made contributions to the discipline. Among the many students he taught at

the USC and are the now distinguished scholars, are two who providentially came to work with me: Prof. Philip Nguessimo Mutaka and Prof. Edmond Biloa. Thanks to a call I made to our friend and senior colleague Prof. Larry Hyman at the USC, indicating my need to recruit one linguist in the area of Phonology and one in Syntax he gave me the names of those two products of Douglas Pulleyblank, Larry Hyman et. al. They were recruited in the early nineties from USC to join me in Cameroon to rebuild the Department of Linguistics at the University of Yaoundé, and contribute to the growth of the new Department of Linguistics which we created at the University of Buea. Doug's stay in Los Angeles was apparently pre-ordained as a compulsory station to enable him complete his informal training before returning to Canada as an undisputable **master** in the field of Phonology, having mastered and dominated all aspects of the discipline within the career perspective: *teaching, mentoring, research, research supervision, publishing, etc.*

### **DOUGLAS PULLEYBLANK, BACK IN CANADA**

From the USC, Douglas returned to a career in Canada to assume the final laps of his destiny and complete an illustrious career that has been crowned with success over the years in the face of challenges. Let me end by recalling with gratitude that while he was settled in Canada, in May 2010, I was invited to give a keynote address at the Annual Conference on African Linguistics in Toronto. Doug, who had no plans to attend the conference that year, when he learned that I was coming to Canada after a considerable period of "long time no see", flew into Toronto from British Columbia, (from the other end of the Canadian *continent*) and was given the "responsibility" of introducing me to the mammoth audience for the keynote. Douglas made that **responsibility** "*a pleasant duty*" and you can fill in what he must have said in glowing terms!

We are delighted that Professor Douglas Pulleyblank has reached this important milestone of transition; a milestone that underscores his achievements and compels us to have a retrospective look at his accomplishments and their impact. Let me welcome Doug into the universe of the retired and retiring with a piece of advice.

Doug, as you look forward to what is termed "retirement from active service" which is determined by your age, a lot of fuss will be made around you by all and sundry, subtly imputing motives on your ability, your mobility, your capability, your possibilities and your activities. Refuse to give room for anyone to consider you a **dinosaur** only fit for some Museum of Antiquities to be contemplated on by some curiosity mongers! Consider retirement as the beginning of another round of **active service** with opportunities to avoid routine and stress while welcoming opportunities to engage and commit yourself to novel and exciting possibilities and duties that are bound to come your way. Do this as I did some time ago and before I realized it, it has been seventeen years and counting! Count yourself among the **retired but not tired!** Counting God's blessings on your life and the impact of your life on all who have known you, there is a lot of evidence of a fruitful impact and lots of reasons for gratitude to God for a life well lived for service. To God be the glory!

Doug, Anne Marie, Ingrid and Cato, we rejoice with you as we celebrate Doug who deserves to be celebrated (along with Anne Marie for her constant support) for a life of commitment, dedication and devotion in service to the family, the university, the nation and humanity. To God be the glory!

***Prof. Beban Sammy Chumbow***

Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, University of Yaoundé I

President, Cameroon Academy of Sciences

Chair, African Scientific Research and Innovation Council (ASRIC), African Union.