



Learning reading and writing at the Karl-G. Prasse – School in Amataltal  
 (photo: The Cooperative of Amataltal)

## Research for the poorest – Karl-G. Prasse 1929-2018

- translated from Danish by Kristian Katholm Olsen – original <http://gtu.dk/PK135-4-5.pdf>

Sadly, we have lost Karl-G. Prasse, 88 years old, the 12th April 2018. He outlived his wife, Bodil, who died the 25th of December 2017. He was a lecturer in Arabic and Berber languages and was the Danish person who had the greatest amount of knowledge in this area. He is especially known for his research work with the Berber language, Tuareg, which is spoken by substantial minority groups in multiple countries in Northern and Western Africa. In 2008 Prasse received the gold medal of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters for his great research work on Tuareg.

In his time on the University of Copenhagen Karl-G. Prasse studied General Linguistics and Hebrew from 1948-50 and Arabic and Ancient Egyptian from 1950 to 1953. In the years 1953-54 Prasse lived in Paris and Rome, where he studied Berber languages including Tuareg, as well as Arabic, Somali, Old Ethiopian and Amharic. In 1954-56 Prasse moved back to Copenhagen to study Old Egyptian.

In 1958-59 he started his research in Tuareg in Paris and Algeria. In 1959 he married his wife, Bodil, in Paris.

In 1956 Prasse became mag.art. in Egyptology at the University of Copenhagen, continued his study of Hamito-Semitic Languages and specialized early on in Berber and Arabic dialects (The Cairo dialect).



Karl-G. Prasse at GtU's 30 years jubilee in Copenhagen 2008  
(photo: Lis Bille)

From 1969 to 1996 he was hired as a lecturer in Berber and Arabic dialects at Copenhagen University, where most of his time was spent at the former Carsten Niebuhr Institute.

Karl-G. Prasse was in charge of the development of a Tuareg writing language on the basis of the Latin alphabet and he produced a complete Tuareg grammar. In 2003, after 30 years work, he published a Tuareg-French dictionary in two volumes.

In 2002 Karl-G. Prasse, with the aid of Genvej til Udvikling, achieved financial support from Danida to erect a school in Amataltal in northern Niger. At the school they teach Tuareg in addition to French – among other things on the basis of Prasse's textbooks. The school is also named after Karl-G. Prasse.

The original contact to Amataltal came into being, because Karl-G. Prasse had built a research cooperation around the Tuareg Language with the former headmaster, Ghabdouane Mohamed who is born in Amataltal and who was a General Secretary in the Cooperative in Amataltal<sup>1</sup>.

Through three decades Karl corresponded with Ghabdouane. During the whole process of the regional development project Karl wrote articles to Projekt & Kultur<sup>2</sup> about the living conditions and fascinating culture of the Tuaregs<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Obituary: <http://gtu.dk/PK134-3.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Quarterly paper published by Genvej til Udvikling.

Niger is one of the poorest countries on the planet and the devastation of various terrorist groups is one of the reasons why it is difficult for the population and the authorities to fight poverty. This is especially a problem in the northern regions, where the Tuareg people predominantly resides. With or without the terrorist threat there may be perspectives in the fact, that Tuareg is taught at a number of schools.

Research around the globe in widely different contexts makes it probable, that children learn best in their Mother's tongue, that is, they acquire knowledge on the same language, that their mother sang to them when they were infants - a language in which she told adventures to them a couple of years later.

It therefore makes sense to name Professor Karl-G. Prasse's life's work as research for the poorest. He was an honorary member of Genvej til Udvikling<sup>4</sup>. All honour to his name!

- *Jørgen Olsen, coordinator, Genvej til Udvikling.*

It is a great loss for us all. They say, that every time a human being dies, a whole library disappears, but with Karl's death an incredibly big and totally invaluable library and a warm and conscientious human being has disappeared.

- *Ingrid Poulsen, prospector in 1997 on the first phase of project process in Amataltal.*

He is irreplaceable. We must hope someone can follow up on his work as a linguist and cultural researcher.

- *María Cecília Castro-Becker, faithful and active member of Genvej til Udvikling.*

It is with regret and consternation that we learn that our father figure Ghabdouane Mohamed's good friend, lecturer Karl-G. Prasse now has gone away after Ghabdouane was called home to God the 4th of January. On behalf of the Cooperative of Amataltal we send our sincere condolences to Karl's family and friends. We have in a short time lost two people who have substantially supported development in our region, not at least by strengthening our language, the Tuareg.

- *Ahmed Ghabdouane, The Cooperative of Amataltal.*

I would like to express my sincere condolences. We've lost a great warrior, who fought hard for the growth of our village and particularly of our school. In the name of all members of the Cooperative, and of all pupils of the Karl G-Prasse School in Amataltal, I wish to express my deepest condolences. May his soul rest in peace.

- *Kabir Chaibou (19/05/2018), director of the Karl-G. Prasse School of Amataltal.*

A shortened version of Jørgen Olsen's obituary was brought in Globalnyt the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April. - <https://globalnyt.dk/content/ekspert-i-tuaregisk-er-doed>

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3 The history of the project can be studied at length on [www.gtu.dk/Kooperativet\\_i\\_Amataltal.htm](http://www.gtu.dk/Kooperativet_i_Amataltal.htm) or <http://gtu.dk/introhaefte.pdf> or via 29 articles on [www.gtu.dk/tidsskriftet\\_projekt\\_og\\_kultur.htm](http://www.gtu.dk/tidsskriftet_projekt_og_kultur.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Short Cut to Development.