Language Policy
of Stellenbosch University

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The essence of the Policy

Stellenbosch University (SU) uses language in a way that is oriented towards engagement with knowledge in a diverse society across a range of academic, social, administrative and professional contexts. The University creates opportunities for the advancement of multilingualism on institutional and individual levels as a key part of our academic project, and ensures equitable access to SU for all South African citizens, and international students alike. With our campuses situated in the Western Cape, we commit ourselves to the promotion of Afrikaans, English and Xhosa at undergraduate level. We do this with an innovative, inclusive and future-focused spirit, preparing students to be thought leaders in a global knowledge economy.

This Policy aims to provide a framework for staff and students to use language in a pedagogically sound way, with enough flexibility, pragmatism and scientific support to enhance the quality and social impact of our learning, teaching and research at SU.

1. Introduction

The Constitution[1] determines that everyone has the right to receive education at public education facilities in the official language or languages of their choice, where that is reasonably achievable. One aspect of the diversity of our society is the variety of languages we use. The Constitution grants official status to eleven different languages and regards all these languages as assets that should be used as a means of developing the human potential of our country. This important personal, professional, academic and social asset should therefore be exploited collectively – also by the South African tertiary education sector.

The core function of Stellenbosch University (SU) within the abovementioned context is engagement with knowledge. The knowledge spectrum of the University is limited in the sense that a number of focus areas comprise its core; the spectrum is extensive in the sense that it covers a variety of academic disciplines and entails both undergraduate and postgraduate learning and teaching, as well as research nationally and internationally. In this engagement with knowledge, the University takes account of the diversity in society, especially regarding our linguistic diversity, and the intellectual wealth inherent therein.

The University strives for local application of the knowledge created in international context, inter alia, with due allowance for the diversity of the regional and national community.

2. The multilingual context

The University follows a dynamic process to make the institution more inclusive and diverse, also by utilising multiple languages. SU creates opportunities for the advancement of institutional and individual multilingualism.

An overriding principle in the implementation of a multilingual Policy, however, should be that no language be allowed to function as an instrument of exclusion.

Although we acknowledge SU as a national asset, we restrict our institutional commitment to the promotion of Afrikaans, English and Xhosa only, as the three official languages of the Western Cape. In terms of the promotion of individual multilingualism, however, we embrace all the language groups in South Africa and

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[1] The Language Policy takes the Constitution and all other relevant legislation and reports into account.

encourage formal and informal learning, and the accommodation of e.g. additional language-specific tutorials in cases where feasible.

English

English is an official language of the Western Cape and has become the main language of instruction at school level. English is used by speakers of different languages to socialise and to communicate academically and also has international value. Therefore the University uses English (in addition to the other official languages) in the execution of its learning and teaching, research, administrative and support functions.

Afrikaans

Afrikaans is one of the official South African languages widely practised in the Western Cape. It has developed an academic repertoire over decades, to which Stellenbosch University contributed, and supporting the academic potential of Afrikaans, is a means of empowering a large and diverse community. The University remains committed to maintaining the status of Afrikaans for academic, administrative and communication purposes for the benefit of speakers of all the varieties of Afrikaans.

IsiXhosa

IsiXhosa is used by one of the largest language communities in South Africa. It is one of the official languages of the Western Cape and on the increase in this and other regions. By means of specific initiatives, the University undertakes to contribute to the advancement of isiXhosa as a developing academic language in addition to expanding isiXhosa as an internal language of communication.

3. Application of the Policy

The Language Policy applies to all faculties, support services divisions, management bodies, staff and students of the University.

4. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of the Language Policy is to guide language planning and language management at the University.

5. Aims of the Policy

(a) To comply with the University's Vision 2030 by means of a multilingual offering to enable inclusivity.

(b) To facilitate effective learning and teaching and research as well as service delivery at SU.

(c) To promote multilingualism as an important distinguishing characteristic of the University and its graduates.

6. Policy principles

The University's Language Policy is to be executed with due observance of the following important principles:

(a) The University acknowledges and respects the core values enshrined in the South African Constitution; particularly those related to education.

(b)   The University respects students' and staff's languages and levels of language proficiency.

(c)   Emphasis is placed on inclusivity, diversity and the effective construction of knowledge which implies that a specific language may not be used to exclude students, staff or other stakeholders of SU.

(d)   The Language Policy supports and advances the values and points of departure described in the University's Institutional Intent and Strategy.

(e)   The Language Policy positions the University to make a contribution to the advancement of both institutional and individual multilingualism as an asset.

(f)   The success of the Language Policy is dependent on the establishment of suitable and sufficient language support, language services and academic staff development services.

(g)   The Language Policy adapts to the changing language demographics and language preferences of students and staff.

(h)   With the implementation of the Language Policy the availability of staff and resources will be taken into account.

7.   Policy provisions

The Language Policy of Stellenbosch University is implemented in the following ways:

7.1   Learning and teaching

(a)   Afrikaans and English are the University's languages of learning and teaching, and SU is committed to purposefully support the academic application of both languages in the complete learning experience of students that includes lectures and other facilitated learning opportunities, e.g. tutorials.

(b)   For undergraduate modules up to and including third year, Afrikaans and English are therefore applied in two usage configurations by taking the complete learning experience of students into account[2].

    (i)   For modules where it is reasonable (in terms of enrolment, resources and staff) and where it is pedagogically sound to divide the students in more than one class group, parallel medium teaching (P) is used with lectures in Afrikaans and English for different class groups. However, to prevent language isolation and to foster tolerance and respect, care is taken by the lecturer(s) to provide opportunities for students from the two language groups to meet and communicate across languages in academic settings.

    (ii)   In all other class groups that are not divided, dual medium teaching (D) is used where all information is conveyed in English. Additional support is provided in Afrikaans and/or English in the lecture and/or during the auxiliary, facilitated learning opportunities to assist students' understanding of the academic material. This will depend on the capabilities of the lecturers and teaching assistants. Real-time interpreting services from both English to Afrikaans and Afrikaans to English can be offered to students – especially in the initial study years.

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[2] Please note: Some modules, such as the language modules are exempt from specifications.

(c)   In terms of the broader learning and teaching context, the following applies:

    (i)   One-on-one interaction in tutorials and mentor sessions may occur in the student's language of choice: Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, where the Faculty's staff have the linguistic competencies to do so.

    (ii)   The support materials may include a variety of blended learning strategies (e.g. pod- and vodcasts of lectures) made available to students in Afrikaans, English and, in some cases, isiXhosa for further reinforcement of concepts and revision.

    (iii)The compulsory reading material (if available; published material excluded) is available in English and, if reasonably practicable[3], in Afrikaans.

    (iv) Module frameworks and study guides are available in Afrikaans and English.

    (v)   The question papers for examinations, major tests and similar assessments are available in Afrikaans and English.

(d)   The determination, regular review and implementation of the language arrangements are determined by faculties as part of their annual context-specific language implementation plans (cf 7.5a of the Policy) and approved at faculty board meetings as part of the normal reporting structures to Senate.

(e)   Changes to the language arrangements that fall outside this annual review process but are necessitated e.g. by the profile of a specific student group's preferred language of tuition, pedagogical considerations or the availability of a lecturer with the necessary language proficiency, can be made if it has the Dean's and the relevant department head's support. These changes need to be reported at the next faculty board and senate meetings. The students of the specific modules should be informed of this decision and the reasons for it.

(f)   These language arrangements are published in the relevant module frameworks.

(g)   In postgraduate learning and teaching, English and/or Afrikaans may be used provided that all students understand the language.

(h)   Academic language and literacies comprise sets of complex practices which are linked to how disciplines create knowledge. Such literacies are best developed within the contexts of academic disciplines and their fields of study.

(i)   The advancement of academic materials in the three official languages of the Western Cape is supported in the form of multilingual glossaries and other academic materials. In certain programmes, provision is made for isiXhosa with a view to facilitate effective learning and teaching, especially where the use of the language may be important for career purposes.

(j)   Where students need alternative texts such as Braille or enlarged texts as a means to communication and understanding information and these are not available from publishers or lecturers, staff can liaise directly with the Braille Office of the University to ensure the timeous availability of alternative texts for students or staff members who require it.

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[3] Taking into account, when the matetrial is a priori not available in Afrikaans, the availability of and the amount of staff time to prepare Afrikaans versions, in relation to the number of students that would benefit from the Afrikaans versions and the scope of the benefit they would derive.

(k)   Sign language is recognised as a means of communication for some deaf people who regard this as their primary means of communication. All reasonable measures are put in place to ensure that classes, tutorials and main University public events have a sign language interpreter available. In addition, real-time captioning can also be considered for lectures, tutorials or official University events.

7.2   Internal institutional communication

In the spirit of the University's Language Policy, preferences of students and staff from diverse language communities should be respected in various forms of communication where possible.

(a)   English and Afrikaans are the institutional languages of the University. Documentation of prime importance (e.g. policies and strategic HR documents relating to service conditions) is made available in English and Afrikaans.

(b)   The language of written communication within faculties and divisions (agendas, hand-outs) and at meetings depends on the language needs of the readers or participants (including staff and students), with due cognisance that no one should be excluded by the language of communication.

(c)   Oral enquiries and requests by students and staff are dealt with, where feasible, in the language of the enquiry or request.

(d)   Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa are used judiciously at official events, such as official meetings, ceremonial occasions, inaugural lectures, and so forth.

(e)   In residences and other living environments, language is used in such a way that no stakeholder is excluded from participating in any formal activities in these environments.

7.3   External communication

(a)   English and/or Afrikaans and, where feasible, isiXhosa are the University's languages of external communication.

(b)   SU respects the language policies and/or language preferences of her partners. This means that normally the official communication and documentation with her partners (this includes official meetings) will be in the language of preference of the partner, or that the necessary services (e.g. translation or interpreting services) will be implemented to take the language of preference into consideration. Where the University does not have the capacity to fulfil the language preference, the medium of communication will be English.

7.4   Support

The Language Centre in collaboration with faculties and other support divisions accepts the responsibility for providing and/or coordinating the relevant language support required for the effective implementation of the Language Policy. Its Director and staff also act as advisors to Management, faculties and support services.

The Language Centre provides the services for real-time interpreting lectures, with appropriate quality assurance and quality reporting procedures.

7.5   Language planning and promotion of multilingualism

(a)   Every faculty and support services division formulates a context specific language implementation plan in accordance with this Policy. The faculties'

respective language implementation plans must be approved by each faculty board and reported in the faculty communications to the Senate. The support services divisions' language implementation plans must be approved by the relevant line managers and the Rector's Management Team. Implementation of this Policy is monitored via the normal management structures and quality assurance mechanisms.

(b)   The University places a high premium on the advancement of multilingualism in faculties and support services and therefore considers from time to time different incentives for faculties, support services and individuals who excel in this regard.

(c)   The Language Centre, in collaboration with faculties, support services and management bodies also takes responsibility for the advancement of multilingualism at SU and ensures that the necessary support is in place.

8.   Conflict resolution

Complaints about the implementation of the Language Policy are dealt with in the first instance by the deans via the student representatives and lecturers, departmental chairs or heads (in the case of faculties) or line managers (in the case of support services). A further level of conflict resolution for the academic environment is the Senate's Academic Planning Committee or, in the case of the broader University, the Rector's Management Team.

In cases where the utilisation of the mentioned structures is not suitable, complaints may be submitted to the ombudsman for settlement in consultation with the relevant structures.

9.   Policy governance

The Language Policy is approved by Council with consent by Senate and after consultation with the Institutional Forum.

The owner of the Policy is the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching. The Vice-Rector oversees the implementation, management and updating of the Policy, and reports on it to Council via the Rector's Management Team and Senate. The Vice-Rector is supported by a Language Planning and Management Project Team that advises and performs tasks on behalf of the Vice-Rector as determined from time to time.

The curator of the Policy is the Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement. The curator also acts in an advisory capacity to the Vice-Rector and works closely with the Director: Language Centre. The Director: Language Centre acts, together with the Language Centre staff, in a research, planning, advisory and supporting capacity to execute the Language Policy effectively in faculties and support services environments.

10.   Revision

Language plicy-making is a dynamic process. The University undertakes to test the Language Policy continuously against changing circumstances by:

(a)   Conducting research on the implementation, application and monitoring of the Language Policy,

(b)   Regularly consulting with the broader University community,

(c)   Processing and publishing information gained from such research and consultation, and

(d)   Amending the Language Policy where and when necessary.

11.   Disclosure

The Language Policy is a public document and is published on the University's website.