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# A BEARER OF HOPE

- Language as an instrument of empowerment at Stellenbosch University -



# Language as an instrument of empowerment in a challenging context of diversity

At Stellenbosch University we approach language management from this people-oriented perspective

# What makes our language management something out of the ordinary?

In these times, when the concept of 'hope' has been given such a central role in all activities at Stellenbosch University (SU), we should focus attention on the role of language, too. Part of this hope is our need as South Africans to find, by means of our diversity our collective power in a world where the challenges are growing ever larger and more complex.

This diversity, of course, includes the linguistic diversity in our country. Therefore, the University wishes to implement inventive language management, first of all to acknowledge our commitment to Afrikaans, but to do so in a context where neither the value of English as a world language nor the richness of the African languages is denied. We have already established this broad principle with our 2002 Language Policy.

However, we also want to account for another crucial principle, namely that language is the responsibility of every one of us. Therefore, the University came up with a creative model for decentralising language planning and its implementation, within an institutional language policy and plan, in such a way that the university community will accept shared ownership and responsibility for language management. SU management, all faculties and support services, as well as our students, have a role to fulfil in this regard.

The tense balance between accessibility,  
student success and the needs of an  
Afrikaans language community

These are the unique and complex issues we tackle at SU

# Language management is not plain sailing

At SU at least three forces contribute to the complexity of our language management model: accessibility, the ideal student profile and student success, and the position of Afrikaans.

We promote accessibility by using Afrikaans and English, the two principal languages of teaching at school level, as our languages of teaching. On the one hand we promote accessibility by means of parallel-medium teaching, which means that a class group is divided into two parallel streams – one Afrikaans, the other English. This option of course puts pressure on already limited resources such as lecturer capacity, the teaching facilities available, and financial resources. On the other hand we promote accessibility by means of double-medium teaching – when both languages are used in the same class room.

Student profile and student success: The ideal profile of a Stellenbosch graduate includes that that person would be able to function in a multilingual context, with the necessary sensitivity to the importance of linguistic diversity. That is why we endeavour to expose our students to more than one language, and this we achieve by means of a mixed language model in which double-medium teaching features alongside parallel-medium teaching.

Student success is promoted by a variety of mechanisms for language support, such as language courses, the development of writing skills and the translation of study material.

The position of Afrikaans is ensured by the University's undertaking that at least 60% of the undergraduate programme offering will be in Afrikaans, and by an inventive and dynamic promotion plan for Afrikaans.

Stellenbosch University truly considers Afrikaans  
a treasure

And we work hard to promote this extraordinary language  
from Africa!

# So what is our position regarding Afrikaans?

SU consolidated its commitment in its Promotion Plan for Afrikaans, a plan that provides in the first place for the application of Afrikaans as language of learning and teaching, and as language of management and administration. Furthermore, there are numerous specific structures and initiatives that embody this plan. To name but a few:

- The splendid role of the Department of Afrikaans and Dutch, not only through the formal courses they offer and the significant research output they deliver, but also through their own imaginative institutional and community-orientated projects
- The Woordfees (Wordfest), which grows by leaps and bounds every year; just imagine: 250 productions with 47 300 festival-goers in 2010 – that represents 38% growth
- The WOW Project (Words open Worlds), which reaches as many as 17 000 school children in SU's source area
- The work that the SU Language Centre does on a wide front for the benefit of Afrikaans
- An e-learning project in Afrikaans that aims at improving students' academic literacy
- A reading-skills project in schools, which is linked to a book distribution project in collaboration with an organisation that distributes books
- SU's ties with and support for the Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT)
- Translation projects, interpreting and editing that benefit Afrikaans, such as translating and adapting the student version of Encyclopaedia Britannica

Of course, this varied offering can grow only if the University enjoys the support of the Afrikaans language community as well.

# The road of developing, implementing and managing a language policy

This road demands of us that we reflect often and that we adapt as a matter of course



# A policy that keeps track of a changing environment

In 2002 we introduced a new language policy and language plan that established Afrikaans as the default undergraduate language, and that provided for three other options (parallel medium, double medium or the bilingual option, and English medium), which could be employed in certain circumstances. At postgraduate level, it gave more freedom to employ English as well.

In order to accommodate all our students in a meaningful way, and in order to find a better balance between access, the ideal student profile and SU's responsibility towards Afrikaans, we developed a multilingual teaching model that provides for:

- A stronger position for parallel-medium teaching, especially in a number of large faculties; this is to be implemented in the first year and also, in some cases, in the second year, while double-medium teaching is to be employed thereafter
- Study material that is available in two languages
- Further investigations into and implementation of the innovative employment of language technology (such as interpreting) for the purpose of promoting multilingualism
- Improved language management by adopting language implementation plans for faculties and support services, an inventive language management approach in South Africa

We do not underestimate the challenges posed by the various options. This is exactly why a language policy like that of SU can never be cast in iron: it needs to take changing circumstances into account. Therefore, we always challenge one another to think innovatively and to keep questioning our language management in a quest for creative solutions.

Language planning that benefits students and staff

We fearlessly take on the challenges of a multilingual teaching model

# Of course our extensive language model also brings challenges!

We often hear “Language costs money.” That certainly is true, and the situation with language at Stellenbosch is no exception. The University takes on this challenge fearlessly by utilising funds sensibly, for example the funds made available for our Overarching Strategic Plan (OSP). For this OSP states unequivocally that an improved language management model should be one of the University’s top goals. We do embrace this challenge, as the following few examples prove:

- R42 million was released in 2010, mainly for implementing parallel-medium teaching; R1,3 million of that money was for promoting Afrikaans
- Spending on language includes, among other things, an annual allocation of R7 million to the Language Centre
- An appropriation of R1 million was made for the WAT
- R350 000 was allotted for launching the research programme
- We took up the challenge to find more funds for the purpose of extending the parallel-medium option

Obviously, other challenges remain, such as considering particular options carefully. Why, we could ask, do we not use interpreting more extensively? How do we strike a balance between the pros and cons of double-medium teaching? The University will always meet the challenge head-on to consider the implementation of different, sometimes complex, solutions.

# Good language management rests upon good research

We occupy ourselves with the science of language policy, language planning and language support in an institutional context, wanting to promote diversity

# Good language management rests upon good research

Effective language management must be informed by good research. Therefore, the University Council approved the Research Programme on Language Development and Language Empowerment, which provides for various research projects that will examine issues such as the following:

- Language attitudes
- The reception of SU's Language Policy
- The viability and acceptability of different language planning models
- Successful practices in different language planning models
- Making use of alternative modalities, such as interpreting and e-learning
- The influence of academic literacy interventions on successful studies
- Language acquisition in a multilingual academic context
- Language testing

By means of this research, we hope to position the University as a leader in the field of language planning and language management. The great number of publications – such as reports on attitudes towards and the reception of SU's Language Policy – that have already appeared attests to this, as do our participation in national and international conferences, presentation of our own extremely successful international conference on language planning and language development in 2009, and many more examples.

Without proper language support, a language policy is worth nothing, of course

Our work regarding language support is recognised nationally and internationally

# Good language management demands an extensive system of language support

Besides the language support offered to students in departmental context, the activities of the SU Language Centre form an integral part of language management at the University.

The following data give an indication of the impact of this language support:

- Every year, around 2 800 students from various faculties take our credit-bearing courses in academic literacy, language acquisition and professional communication
- We develop the writing skills of more than 4 000 students per year
- We present short courses for approximately 1 600 postgraduate students per year
- We present short courses in Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, for staff as well as students
- We serve hundreds of international students who follow our courses in Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa
- We offer language services such as translation, editing and interpreting to a large number of staff, students and external clients
- We develop and facilitate the academic literacy tests that all prospective students take
- We promote isiXhosa by offering training and developing terminology (thus far, we have published nine terminology booklets, among others one with soccer terminology, which coincided with the FIFA World Cup)

Language management in a multilingual context is a complex matter that demands nuanced, well-thought-out solutions. In such a context, there is no room for oversimplification.

“SU has already done splendid work regarding language planning. The University’s most important achievement is the extent to which the institution has implemented its language plan, and especially the extent to which faculties collaborate in the whole process.”

Prof Vic Webb, international expert in the field of language planning, and research fellow of Stellenbosch University; in Kampusnuus

