

## The language approach of Stellenbosch University

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***“It has become fashionable in certain political circles to talk about multilingualism and multiculturalism as if they were recent discoveries instead of what they really are: a condition of life as old as the human species.”***

(Daniel Nettle & Suzanne Romaine in *Vanishing Voices*, 2000)

In an era in which the concept of creating hope plays such a central role in all activities of Stellenbosch University (SU), the focus should also be on the role of language. Part of this hope is our need, as South Africans, to find collective strength through our diversity in a world filled with growing challenges and increasing complexity. This diversity naturally includes the language diversity in our country.

We align our approach to language with the *National Development Plan 2030*, an extensive plan that clearly articulates the importance of multilingualism, the sustained development of our country's languages and the necessity of developing people's skills in more than one language. Furthermore, our approach should be aligned with the University's *Institutional Intent and Strategy*, which includes, among others, our *Vision 2030*:

*Stellenbosch University is inclusive, innovative and future focused: a place of discovery and excellence where both staff and students are thought leaders in advancing knowledge in the service of all stakeholders.*

The essence of the University's language-management model is that we have a multilingual approach where Afrikaans is used and developed as an academic language, while utilising the value of English as an international academic language. Furthermore, we pay attention to the discerning advancement and application of isiXhosa as an academic language and as a language of social engagement. SU therefore follows a dynamic process to make the University more inclusive and diverse, which includes our language offer. Through our multilingual approach we advance institutional multilingualism (the use of more than one language by the institution) and individual multilingualism (the use of more than one language by the individual).

Inclusivity is advanced specifically by using Afrikaans and English in our teaching and engagement. In the teaching context, the two languages are applied in different usage configurations, namely parallel medium (class group is divided into two streams, one Afrikaans and one English), educational interpreting between Afrikaans and English, double medium (Afrikaans and English are used in the same class) and in a minority of cases only Afrikaans or only English. Study material such as module frameworks, study guides, assessment assignments (e.g. tests) are offered in Afrikaans and English. With this mixed language model we want to deliver graduates who understand the multilingual context in our country and who are able to function in this multilingual context.

The University further acknowledges the role of African languages in our multilingual dispensation, and wants to make a contribution through actively advancing isiXhosa as an important local language, and especially as a developing academic language.

The interests of our students and staff are further advanced through a variety of mechanisms for language support, such as language courses, reading- and writing-skills development, the translation of teaching-learning material and other documents, as well as interpreting services.

Afrikaans and English – and, where feasible, isiXhosa – are used as the University's languages of management and administration.

However, we also want to account for another very important principle, namely that everyone is responsible for the advancement and application of language. To this end, the University has devised an imaginative model to ensure that language planning and implementation, within an institutional Language Policy and Plan, is done in such a way that the University community accepts shared ownership and responsibility for language management. The University management, all faculties and support services as well as our students play a role in this endeavour.