

THE FUTURE PROSPECTS OF AFRIKAANS AS A UNIVERSITY
LANGUAGE IN A MULTILINGUAL SETTING: THE CASE OF
STELLENBOSCH

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Abstract

Language is of critical importance in curriculum delivery as it determines how knowledge is constructed, transmitted and received. The hegemony of English has led to a gradual decrease in the use of Afrikaans at the historically Afrikaans universities (HAUs). This article investigates the prevailing debate about the future of Afrikaans as a university language. Based on the premise that South Africa is a multilingual country with eleven official languages where most students are not Afrikaans or English speaking, the problem we investigated is whether there is still a place for Afrikaans as a university language. There is a strong correlation between mother-tongue instruction and success in academic performance (Alexander, 1997; De Varennes, 2010). Yet, in most South African universities, English is the default language of instruction, which means most South African students have to study through their second language. The article will argue that many students are academically unsuccessful because the nature of learning through a second language is extremely complex (Woolfolk, 2010:43). Based on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory and his description of language competency in a second language and the acquisition thereof, this article will rely on a literature study with special focus on the language debate at Stellenbosch University. Against this background the article will motivate why a multilingual language policy is recommended.

Keywords: university language, medium of instruction, multilingualism, higher education institutions, Afrikaans universities, language policy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following the dismantling of apartheid, it was imperative to transform the higher education system in South Africa so as to overcome the legacies of apartheid. A key element in the broad interpretation of transformation is epistemological transformation, i.e. how knowledge is constructed, transmitted and received. The role of language is therefore critical in higher education transformation, as it impacts on access and success, and affirms diversity. Language is an emotional matter, especially if one's language is ignored (Van der Elst, 2015). Vilakazi (2002:50) argues that the language issue is at the core of the education crisis in South Africa, because language is the key to conceptualisation, comprehension and learning.

In this regard, all institutions of higher education are now committed to multilingualism in one form or another. On the other hand, the right of a student to "instruction in the language of his or her choice, where this is reasonably practicable" is afforded by the constitution (RSA 1996). It is no wonder, then, that language policy is the subject of contestation and even violence in higher education institutions in South Africa. This controversy about language policies is especially true for higher education institutions such as Stellenbosch University where the language debate entered the national public terrain (Kapp, 2013:10).¹

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Canadian language sociologist, Jean Laponce (2002), listed two prerequisites for a language to survive. The first is that the language should have its own region, and secondly, it must have strong institutions such as universities and media. Therefore, the problem that I will be investigating in this article is whether Afrikaans will lose its status as a university language in South Africa. Steyn (2013) warned that a language which loses its higher language functions, is in danger of eventually also losing its lower functions. He is of the opinion that the loss of Afrikaans at universities can eventually cause a chain reaction in the public sector and the economy.

Research by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2009) on the future of higher education in the developing world, found that without an outstanding higher education system, developing countries struggle to maintain sustainable economic growth. Therefore, emerging economies such as South Africa must constantly ask themselves whether the quality of their higher education promotes economic growth. Barriers which prevent the youth² from

¹ Within the context of this article, 'university language' will refer to medium of instruction as well as an 'academic' language used to conduct and publish research in papers, theses and books

² Unemployment amongst youth between 15 to 34 is 36.1%, versus 32.7% in 2008 (Die Vryburger 9 June 2014).

gaining access to higher education must also be removed. This includes a language of instruction.

The debate at Stellenbosch University was fuelled by Willie Esterhuyse's article '*Can South Africa afford five Afrikaans universities?*' and stems from the fact that some scholars such as Willie Esterhuyse (cf. Kapp, 2013:63) are of the opinion that the medium of instruction should no longer be exclusively Afrikaans and that multilingualism would support former disadvantaged students to gain access to the university. The late vice-chancellor, Russel Botman, is on record saying: "We don't want to be an exclusively Afrikaans university, nor an exclusively English university (Botman, 2010:63). In fact at SU multilingualism is regarded as an asset (cf. Botman, 2011:14).

On the one hand universities such as Stellenbosch are accused of having turned their backs on Afrikaans (Du Plessis, 2010; Carstens, 2015). On the other hand, there is a growing feeling that the HAUs use Afrikaans as an alibi to exclude black students and as an excuse to keep universities white (De Vos, 2011; Kapp, 2013:167; Retief, 2014b:4). The rector of the Free State University puts it this way:

"Some of the historically white Afrikaans universities have a perfect alibi for not transforming - Afrikaans. When ... the University of Stellenbosch is pushed to enrol more black students, they take refuge in language rights protected by the constitution. Somebody must tell these campus leaders that in the wake of our horrific racist past, white-dominant campuses are morally unacceptable" (Jansen, 2014).

These accusations come at a time when students across South Africa are calling on university managements to transform universities and to ensure that language is not used as an exclusion mechanism (Van den Berg, 2015, UCT, 2015, Le Cordeur, 2015).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Hence Carstens' (2014) as well as Hans du Plessis' (2014) question, '*Is there still place for a government-supported Afrikaans university in South Africa?*' is relevant in the context of this article. The question that I will be asking in this article is:

Is there still place for a government-supported Afrikaans university in South Africa given the Constitution which affords every student the right to tuition in the language of his choice?

The following sub questions will be investigated in this article:

- (i) From a historic background, why is it necessary to transform the language policy?
- (ii) What guarantees, if any, does the SA constitution present to Afrikaans universities?
- (iii) What is the international trend regarding single language universities and what lessons can we learn from universities in Europe, Asia and Africa?
- (iv) Why is there still a need for Afrikaans as a university language?

- (v) Which tuition models will best address the specific challenges at Stellenbosch University (henceforth SU)?

The research is based on a literature study mainly of the relevant historical sources. Many current educational practices, theories and issues can be better understood in light of past experiences. The knowledge of education history can yield insight into the evolution of the current educational system as well as into practices and approaches that have been found to be ineffective or unfeasible. Policy makers at any level in education can benefit from the contributions of historical research through a literature study in arriving at decisions (Creswell 2009), such as decisions in the field of language and language policies.

First the historic background of the historically Afrikaans universities (HAUs) is sketched. This is followed by a discussion of every aspect as it emerges from the sub questions above, namely: The reason for transformation, guidelines in the constitution, international trends, Afrikaans as an academic language, student views and whether there is still a demand for Afrikaans from Afrikaans-speaking students. Lastly the language debate at SU and a possible language model for SU are discussed also on the basis of a literature review.

It is hoped that this article will shed some light on the language debate at SU, and that it will not only contribute to a better understanding of the language complexity that is currently experienced at higher education institutions (HEI), but will also explain why we suggest instructional multilingualism as an alternative language model for SU.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the fact that 80.5% (RSA, 2011:4) of South African students are black and not Afrikaans or English speaking, but have one of the indigenous languages as their home language. These students' level of proficiency in English is often not good enough in order for them to be successful at university. However research suggests that success in education is related to language proficiency (Alexander, 1997; Vilakazi, 2002; Heugh, 1999; Webb, 2010; De Varennes, 2010; Le Cordeur, 2012). Yet, in most South African universities, English is the default language of instruction which means most students studying at South African universities, do so through their second or even third language. It could be argued that the reason why many students who have one of the indigenous languages as their mother tongue have such a low success rate, is because the nature of a second-language as a medium of instruction is extremely complex (Woolfolk, 2010:43).

In this regard, this article will draw on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory as well as on Cummins' (2008) concepts of BICS and CALP to describe the acquisition of language competency in a second language.

Vygotsky's theory stresses the role of language in cognitive development (Woolfolk, 2010:44; Jordaan, 2011:17) as well as the relationship between language, thought and speech (Louis, 2010:20). Vygotsky (1978:86) identifies two levels of development, namely the actual level of development and the potential

level of development. The gap between these two levels is known as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The actual level of development and knowledge that a student has of the language of instruction is more than often not good enough to cope at tertiary level.

Similarly, Cummins (2008) identified two concepts important for language acquisition: “*Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills*” (BICS) refers to basic everyday social communication whilst the second concept (CALP), refers to “*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*”. The first concept points to a basic low level of language competency and is mainly used for basic needs. The second refers to the mastering of complicated and abstract concepts and a vocabulary that allows for a deep and thorough analysis and interrogation with text (Cummins, 2008). Somebody who has achieved the first level of language skills, who can talk comfortably in the target language, is not necessarily competent enough to interrogate with the language on the second level. Afrikaans speaking students and students who have one of South Africa’s nine indigenous languages as their mother tongue, and who have mastered English on a communicative level, but not yet as an academic language on the second level, are discriminated against if English is the only language of instruction at university.

However, this does not mean the students do not have the potential to develop in the target language i.e. English (Cummins, 2008) and close this gap of ZPD (Vygotsky 1978). As pointed out by Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism, knowledge is actively constructed by means of collaborative learning and teaching for meaning and understanding (Crotty, 2012:1) and as Woolfolk (2010:42) points out, it the development of knowledge by interacting with others and the environment. Vygotsky argues that cognitive development takes place through three main elements: culture, language and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky regards students as being born as social beings who learn through interaction with other people (Williams & Burden, 1997). It is through this interaction between peers, or fellow students and adults like lecturers (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:197) that the student makes sense of the world around him.

Vygotsky viewed “the sociocultural context of learning as a socially constructed, mediated process” (Jordaan, 2011:13). As such, communication and collaboration with others, in written and spoken form, become vital to effective learning. In this article I will argue, as did Woolfolk (2010:43) that students acquire higher levels of thinking by fostering social relationships facilitated by language in class, on campus, in discussions with fellow students and lecturers. Therefore, this study works from the premise that students will become more proficient in the language of instruction within the social constructivism ambit due to the interactions within the social context. Vygotsky’s ZPD assures development through help and support which ultimately leads to independence. The ZPD assures that “[w]hat the student is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (Chaiklin, 2003:40).

It can be argued that the student’s level of proficiency the language of instruction will gradually develop through the construction of knowledge in order for

him/her to be successful at university. This article will argue that a multilingual language model will be ideal in guiding the students through collaboration to reach a higher level of proficiency in the target language.

5. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before South Africa became a democracy in 1994, Afrikaans was the medium of instruction at a number of universities in South Africa. The universities of Pretoria (UP), Stellenbosch, Free State (UFS), the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (today the Northwest University (NWU), Rand Afrikaans University (today the University of Johannesburg) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) were all historically Afrikaans and had trained hundreds of thousands of students who made a huge contribution to the public good of South Africa (Carstens, 2015). The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was initially also an Afrikaans university and during the time of apartheid, it was a home for so called Coloured³ people. Yet, there is seldom referred to UWC as a historically Afrikaans university⁴.

According to Giliomee (2014:586), Afrikaans has deteriorated at university level. At UWC, Afrikaans had disappeared completely by 1990 and the same would happen at RAU and the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE). Afrikaans is still used in parallel form at UFS who committed itself to a multilingual policy (UFS, 2015). Afrikaans is no longer a key language at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and Afrikaans-speaking students have decreased significantly. UP mainly follows a parallel model and at the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU Afrikaans has come under siege (Carstens, 2014). It is often overlooked that the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) with its four campuses in Wellington, Bellville, Mowbray and Cape Town is, with the exception of UNISA, the largest university in South Africa, with 56,000 students. Due to the amalgamation of a number of institutions like the Wellington and Paarl Teachers' Colleges which had white Afrikaans students as well as Coloured Afrikaans-speaking students, the Peninsula Technicon (today called the Cape Peninsula University of Technology) houses a large number of Afrikaans students; about 20% or 11,500 of the total.

At NWU's Potchefstroom campus Afrikaans is still the dominant language (80%). At UP (35% in 2005 to 30% in 2012) and UFS (from 38% in 2005 to 36% in 2012) Afrikaans is decreasing due to the growing number of black students who prefer the English medium. In Stellenbosch the strong growth among white English students has led to a decrease in Afrikaans student numbers from 60% in 2005 to 48%

³ According to Essack & Quayle (2007:73), the classification of social groups in terms of race is always problematic. The term 'Coloured' here refers to people who were classified as 'Coloured' in terms of apartheid legislation as must not be regarded as the author's approval of terms that label people on racial grounds.

⁴ When the author was a student at UWC in the seventies and early eighties, Afrikaans was the main language of tuition.

in 2012. The question now is whether this tendency can simply be ascribed to the deterioration of Afrikaans at HAUs, as Giliomee alleges (2014:586), or it can be ascribed to the influx of black students due to the transformation process at South African universities in the post-apartheid era?

Since its inception, SU strived towards Afrikaans tuition at the highest level and as previously stated (cf. Kloss, 1977), SU managed to establish Afrikaans as university language. SU's determination to promote Afrikaans as academic language is apparent from the regular publication of articles and papers. Among others, SU launched medical and engineering training in Afrikaans after 1930. Other subjects followed and today Afrikaans is established as university language in all faculties (Kapp, 2013:48).

But things have changed after 1970. English has emerged as the dominant language in dissertations and academic publications in the Western world. The increasing dominance of English as world language led to a gradual decrease in the use of Afrikaans as university language (Giliomee, 2003). Researchers who had previously published in Afrikaans, switched to English. The Afrikaans component in masters' and doctoral dissertations in natural sciences decreased from 36% in the period 1960–1973 to 9 per cent currently. In the Arts and Social Sciences Faculties, it decreased from 62% to 48% between 1975 and 1996 (cf. Giliomee, 2014:579).

6. THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION

Since South Africa became a democracy it became essential to transform the higher education system (Madiba, 1999: 73). After 1994, South Africans forgot that values such as nation building and reconciliation had to be continually revisited, because transformation is a never-ending process (Le Cordeur, 2015). Within the context of Higher Education, 'transformation' refers broadly to the changes that the modern university must undergo in the fast-growing globalising world. According to the government's 'White Paper 3: *A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*', higher education must be the foundation on which the development of a new South Africa is based (DoBE, 1997:7). Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa also includes the development of new curricula and adaptable models for learning and tuition (DoBO, 1997:10). This means that the curriculum which was used in the past to exclude Coloured and black students (Le Cordeur, 2011) must transform to a more democratic curriculum inclusive of all thinking. A key aspect in the delivery of a curriculum is how knowledge is constructed and transmitted. This means that the language through which the curriculum is instructed is of critical importance because knowledge and concepts are conceptualised through language (Banda, 2000, 53). This argument is supported by Vilakazi (2002:50). She writes:

"[It] must be stress[ed] that the mastery of [the] language in which the subject is taught is the prerequisite to the mastery of subject matter. The African student has to make the acquaintance of the subject through a language [that is] not his or her mother tongue. [The] language of instruction then becomes a tension-generating factor ... which interferes with the mastery of the subject matter.

Wolff (2006:49) sums it up best when he states: ‘Language is not everything in education, but without language everything is nothing in education.’

Transformation also means increased participation by the wider community which includes an increase in the number of black students and lecturers, women, and persons with disabilities. As a result, the government increasingly insisted that the HAUs should admit more black students (Giliomee, 2014, 584). The implication of this was that the offering of English medium classes had to increase. This had a drastic influence on the tuition offered in Afrikaans.

As a result, Kader Asmal, Minister of Higher Education, appointed a special committee led by Prof. Jakes Gerwel to advise on how Afrikaans could maintain its higher function in the long term (Giliomee, 2003). The Gerwel Committee proposed that two universities be designated to accept a special responsibility for the development of Afrikaans. They would have to report to Parliament annually on their progress in this regard (Kapp, 2013:125). Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom indicated that they would accept this challenge, but the vice-chancellors of UP and UFS opposed the idea. The vice-chancellors could not reach consensus (Giliomee & Schlemmer, 2006:52-57). Sadly one of the golden opportunities to retain Afrikaans as university language was lost.

These and other issues prompted Minister Naledi Pandor in 2008 to appoint a committee, namely the *Ministerial Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (hereafter the Ministerial Committee), to investigate the perceived discrimination in public educational institutions. This ministerial committee found then already that South African universities required radical change (Soudien et al., 2008). The Soudien Report was not positively received by all universities, but it was enlightening that the Council for Higher Education agreed with the findings that the curricula had to be transformed.

7. AFRIKAANS IN THE CONSTITUTION

Many leaders (cf. Habib, 2014: 27) referred to the constitution and pleaded that the inequalities in higher education should be addressed and that a new national identity be created among all students. The question being investigated here is how equitable it is that one language, English, should be imposed on all universities (Steward, 2014) as Section 6 (4) of the constitution (RSA, 1996) stipulates that all official languages have equal status. Further, section 29 (2) of the constitution affords each South African the right to receive tuition in public educational institutions in the official language of their choice. There is, however, a condition which must be noted because it is the basis on which the whole language debate is waged, namely: “[...] if it is reasonably practicable and fair”. The state, thus, has the responsibility to investigate all reasonable possibilities, providing they comply with the principles of equality and feasibility. This includes single medium institutions. Some (cf. Steward, 2014; Giliomee, 2014) argue that this is adequate reason for Afrikaans to have an assured place in higher education. Steward (2014) debates for

example that in the Western Cape where Afrikaans is by far the majority language; it is fair that at least one of the four universities should have Afrikaans as its language of instruction. Steward (2014) further points out that section 6 (2) of the constitution requires that the state should take tangible steps to increase the status and use of indigenous languages. How, he asks, does this accord with the constitution if one of the indigenous languages (Afrikaans), which has already attained that status, is neglected?

An authority on international and constitutional law and co-author of the constitution of South Africa, Marinus Wiechers (2010), quoted the constitution in saying that the language of instruction at university level is ultimately the choice of the university council. The law provides no compelling powers to the minister and additionally ministerial prescriptiveness would be contrary to the autonomy of a university which is guaranteed in section 16 (i) (d) of the constitution (2010:9). But there is a condition: According to Wiechers (2010, 12) the onus is on universities to prove that Afrikaans has the academic vocabulary and abilities to serve as medium of instruction at higher education. The institution must prove that Afrikaans is not serving as a mechanism to discriminate against people on the grounds of language. Thus, Afrikaans universities must ensure that students are maximally empowered to acquire and improve knowledge and skills.

The report of the Council for Higher Education (CHE, 2009:10) indicates that for students, it is not about the two 'white' languages. Especially, black students feel excluded and ask that indigenous languages come into their own in class. This shows that SU's intention to take greater responsibility for isiXhosa (SU, 2014) is testimony of the university's intent to move towards multilingualism. It is also significant that Afrikaans organisations such as the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* (South African Academy for Science and Arts; Carstens 2015) and the *Afrikaanse Taalraad* (Afrikaans Language Board; Le Cordeur, 2015) support the Minister's initiative (Nzimande 2014) to make it compulsory for all students to study an African language.

8. INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

To put the language debate in South African universities in context, I refer shortly to four international models. I shall point out similarities to the language debate at Stellenbosch and the solutions each country reached. Towards the end, I give a synoptic international perspective on the language debate and the lessons to be learnt from them by SU.

Canada is a country with a population of 32 million with Ottawa as capital and English as the home language of the majority of citizens. In total, 7.5 million Canadians have French as home language, of which the most live in the province Quebec. Canada has a bilingual language policy with English and French as official languages. The University of Ottawa markets itself as a French-English bilingual university. According to the university's statute it must promote bilingualism while it must also preserve the French culture. The financial cost of bilingualism is usually

discounted against the cultural and educational advantages offered by the policy (Van der Walt & Brink, 2005).

The Finnish model is directly opposed to the Canadian model. Finland is a country with a population of 5.2 million people. The language policy dictates that Finland is a bilingual country with Finnish and Swedish as official languages. Only 5.2% of people in Finland speak Swedish. According to the constitution of Finland, the *Abo Akademi University* is a monolingual and exclusively Swedish university which provides for the minority Swedish students. The Helsinki University, with more than 36 000 students, is a bilingual university offering classes in Swedish and Finnish. However, in practice Helsinki has become a multilingual university because the university is increasingly internationalising and using English at postgraduate level (Van der Walt & Brink, 2005).

India as a developing country has managed to make its mark internationally. Although Koos Bekker (UV, 2015) says Indians work harder, the department of Afrikaans at UFS is of the opinion it is because India has handled the issue of languages of instruction at schools and universities wisely. India manages to empower students to take part in the global economy, and does it by utilising local languages as well as English. Learners receive instruction in their home language as well as English – in their mother tongue, because it is the language in which learning is optimal; and English is acquired properly at a young age so that the students can compete globally.

As far as the African continent is concerned, Van der Walt & Brink (2005:824) note that the language debate has raged between two viewpoints: On the one hand is the militant group which sees English as the Killer Language which destroys indigenous languages. On the other hand, there is the more moderate group which is of the opinion that English is a mechanism of empowerment and that nations voluntarily relinquish their mother tongue. The economic and cultural empowerment of the African continent is increasingly seen as a combination of the recognition of the African language plus the use of English.

The question is now which lessons are to be learnt from the international examples mentioned above. Worldwide dual medium (known as the T-option at SU) is experienced as very problematic and is not recommended (De Varennes, 2010:25; Webb, 2012: 216). Among the reasons are that lecturers and students are not equally comfortable in both languages (Plüddemann & Mbude, 2002:29). Students who are less fluent, are disadvantaged when one language is used more than the other. Speakers of the less dominant language are often under pressure to be reasonable and accept the deterioration of their language, which eventually leads to lectures being presented effectively only in the dominant language (Plüddemann & Mbude, 2002:31).

According to the Canadian language sociologist, Fernand de Verannes (2010), especially two models are used worldwide: The monolingual model (such as at the Abo Akademi and Belgium) and the parallel medium teaching (PMT)-model such as in Ottawa and Helsinki. Of the two, PMT or adaptations of it are by far the most common. Giliomee & Schlemmer (2006: xii) are not opposed to PMT, but point out

that it is accompanied by sacrifices: classes have to be repeated, lecturers are not paid extra and research outputs are affected negatively because lecturers have less time for research. Yet, research at UFS has shown that lecturers had made up the backlog within four years (Du Plessis, 2010:142).

Hence, what we have learnt from the international arena is that the ideal solution is a combination of the mother tongue or African language (in this case Afrikaans) because it is the language in which learning is optimal; plus the use of English so that students can compete globally.

9. THE NEED FOR AFRIKAANS AS A UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE

The question is now: Are there still students with Afrikaans as a mother tongue and do they want to study in Afrikaans (Steyn et al., 2014)? According to the demographer Flip Smit (2010:72), there was strong growth in the market share of undergraduate Afrikaans students at NWU between 1999 and 2008, but less growth at UFS, and at SU and UP it even decreased, while the numbers at UJ decreased drastically. Smit (2010:73) further states that out of a total 760,000 learners (480,000 white and 280,000 Coloured) received Afrikaans tuition at school in 2010. Research has shown that although 110 000 of them will qualify for university, eventually only about 20 000 Afrikaans students can go to university due to financial constraints; too few to justify even one Afrikaans university; unless funders who are well disposed to Afrikaans are prepared to put their hands deep into their pockets.

Students who were consulted on the language policy (*Die Matie*, 2015) point to important trends and needs of the Afrikaans student market. Research among the students of SU (Leibowitz, 2015) showed that although 72% of the students who participated in the research project were Afrikaans-speaking, only 48% indicated that they had come to Stellenbosch for Afrikaans. That means 52% of the students study at SU firstly because they consider it to be a good university. Similarly, Schlemmer (2010) found that most Afrikaans-speaking students were prepared to make concessions to non-Afrikaans speakers. Most of them (80%) are very proud to be bilingual citizens (2010:45) and were prepared to accept a multilingual policy. Their only requirement was a guaranteed and monitored retention of Afrikaans.

10. COLOURED AND BLACK STUDENTS AND THE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

Given SU's geographic location, SU had the best chance of remaining a predominantly Afrikaans university according to Giliomee (2014:587), and thus could assure the future of Afrikaans as a public language. Shortly after he became the first democratically elected president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, during his visit to SU, stated that SU should reflect the demography of South Africa (*Eikestadnuus*, September 1994). Since then, the empowerment of Coloured Afrikaans-speaking students especially from rural areas has been highlighted by many authors as an important aspect which requires urgent attention (Botman, 2010: Smit, 2010:72; Wiechers, 2010:12; Giliomee, 2014). This is because 66% of the total Coloured

population have Afrikaans as home language and, as Schlemmer (2010:48) points out, Coloured Afrikaans speakers' participation in tertiary education is the lowest of all the communities in South Africa. This gave rise to organisations such as the *Stigting vir Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans*, *Die Afrikaanse Taalraad* and *Rachels Angels* under the leadership of Christo van de Rhee, Michael le Cordeur and Rachel Jaftha respectively which had the task to erase the backlogs to ensure a greater pool of Coloured and black Afrikaans-speaking students at SU. The purpose, as stated by the previous SU rector was clear: 'If we do not succeed with them, Afrikaans will not succeed' (Botman, 2010:65). However, De Vos (2011) emphasises that the focus must remain on empowering *and* developing, otherwise it would look like 'window dressing: just adding a few coloured students from the *platteland*' (countryside; author) to prove a point (De Vos, 2011). More recently it has, however, become clear that this ideal will not be achieved overnight.

SU has currently 31 000 students of which 64% (18 000) are white, 17% (5 000) Coloured and 17% (5 000) black (www.sun.ac.za 2015). The percentage of Coloured and white students who indicated their home language as Afrikaans, or Afrikaans and English, decreased gradually: from 60% in 2005 to 44.9% in 2014 for Afrikaans and from 1.6% to 1.3% for Afrikaans and English. The attempts to attract more non-white Afrikaans-speaking students to SU have not yet had the desired results. In the meantime, pressure on SU to transform increased. It was time for a new strategy.

As said earlier, the transformation of a university has an impact on its language policy. This means that the language policy is closely intertwined with the institutional character of the university. But after 20 years of democracy, SU are still regarded by some (Nzimande, 2014) as not being democratic and inclusive enough and as the numbers above show Coloured and black students are still lacking far behind. Hence, the question must be asked whether the university has transformed sufficiently (Le Cordeur, 2015). Non-Afrikaans-speaking black students for instance put the blame for their poor academic performance on Afrikaans as medium of instruction (*Die Matie*, 2015:3). As a result, the SU Council issued an *Institutional Intent and Strategy* as part of its Vision 2030 (SU, 2013), which describes SU as inclusive, innovative and future orientated (SU, 2013).

This looked like a top down language policy instead of a bottom up approach (cf. Spolsky's policy as text, not policy as practice (2007:1), but the Council did consult with all the various stakeholders. In this strategy multilingualism will play a key role to change the institutional character of SU in such a way 'that SU will be a place where everyone feels welcome' as stated by SU rector during his inaugural speech (De Villiers, 2015). This is related to the broadening of access to the University for those who were excluded in the past.

11. THE LANGUAGE DEBATE AT STELLENBOSCH

South Africa's higher education institutions have a moral obligation to help create a better society. The right to education is a fundamental right of every citizen and the

provision of quality tuition to a diverse group of students is a matter of social justice (SU 2015a). Therefore, curriculum design at higher education institutions must take cultural differences like language into account (Banda, 2000: 63; Vilakazi, 2002). Research leads to transformation and where SU is essentially a research university (De Villiers, 2015), it must be utilised to produce graduates who show a lively interest in, and are involved in the challenges of the real world outside. Soudien's investigation into the position of language of instruction at higher education institutions in South Africa shows that discrimination in the field of language still occurs. According to the Soudien Report (2008), there is no university which does not require serious changes regarding the language of instruction. Too many students are academically unsuccessful; not due to a lack of intelligence, but because many students are unable to express themselves properly in the dominant language of the university (Soudien, 2008).

With the dawn of a new democracy in 1994, the number of students entering SU with little or no skill in Afrikaans emphasised the limitations the language policy had had on the quality of teaching and learning. The language debate is often seen as a conflict about the poor diversity profile of SU rather than about language. The previous rector of SU admitted that the government is exerting pressure to bring the student and staff profile of SU in line with the requirements of the White Paper (Botman, 2011).

The language debate at tertiary institutions led to the appointment of the Gerwel Commission which proposed that two universities be designated to accept a special responsibility for the development of Afrikaans (Gerwel, 2001). At the occasion of the awarding of an honorary doctorate to him in 1996, Mr Mandela said that out of 20 universities it should be possible to find at least one university which could see to the development of Afrikaans. This viewpoint was clearly influenced by the Gerwel Commission (Prof Jakes Gerwel was then the director general in Mandela's office). Ironically, it was the vice-chancellors of the HAUs (with the exception of Andreas van Wyk of SU) who responded negatively (Giliomee, 2014: 584). Another opinion was that if only two universities should receive the responsibility to promote Afrikaans, it would lead to a concentration of Afrikaans-speaking (white) students at one or two campuses, which was not in the spirit of transformation (Soudien et al., 2008).

The language debate at Stellenbosch concentrated on the principles why Afrikaans should be retained as university language. Firstly, there is the legal aspect of article section 29 of the constitution (as explained above), and the fact that any university's language policy is an internal matter (Wiechers 2010:11). Secondly there is the pedagogic principle. According to research, mother tongue instruction is better than second language or third language instruction (Heugh, 1999; Webb, 2010). Thirdly, 80% of students indicated that they were in favour of the continuation of Afrikaans as university language (De Stadler, 2015).

The argument in favour of English revolves around four reasons (Eloff, 2014; Kapp, 2013: 129). First, there is the hegemony of English dictating that English is a world language and that it is to your advantage to study in English because it will

prepare you for work and further study. According to this argument, English is a prerequisite for excellence and to reach diversity goals. Those who dispute this, point out that there are former Maties⁵ who received their training in Afrikaans, who have attained outstanding achievements at international level.

Secondly, there is the legislative aspect. This group debates that an exclusively Afrikaans university is unconstitutional. Thirdly, there is the moral argument: Stellenbosch has, due to its apartheid history, a moral obligation to apply affirmative action regarding the language. Lastly there is the accusation that Afrikaans is used as an exclusionary mechanism while multilingualism will promote diversity (Madi-ba, 1999: 59; Banda, 2000, 63). The defence of Kapp (2013:129) that nothing prevents students from other language groups to study at SU, as long as they understand that this is primarily an Afrikaans university, shows how far apart these groups are. De Vos (2011:11) firmly believes it is unfair that a national asset such as SU should accept a language policy that makes it impossible for the majority of black South Africans to access. The underlying criticism is still that Afrikaans is used as an excuse to keep SU exclusively white (Nzimande, 2014; Jansen, 2014). The accusations are widely denied (cf. Carstens, 2015; Steward, 2014). SU rector made it clear from the start that he is sensitive to this sentiment by recommitting SU to the sustainable transformation of its employee complement and students in terms of race, gender and culture (De Villiers, 2015).

12. QUO VADIS STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY: REVISION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY

Many alumni of Stellenbosch University and others are of the opinion that there appears to be a coordinated attempt to discredit Afrikaans in higher education (Van der Elst, 2015), several vice-chancellors have expressed their support for Afrikaans in the recent past. Cheryl de la Rey emphasises that there is a home for Afrikaans at UP where parallel-medium tuition takes place and the vice-chancellor of NWU has confirmed that Afrikaans shall continue to exist as academic language as long as secondary schools produce Afrikaans students (Le Cordeur, 2015). Regarding SU, the late Botman (2011) repeatedly said that SU must be a multilingual university: 'SU goes to great lengths to consolidate the position of Afrikaans as a language of both teaching and research at university level – in the context of multilingualism and in the interests of human development.' The rector reiterated SU's determination to pursue transformation and inclusivity:

"I am on record that I support the new language policy which was approved by the SU Council in November 2014. This means I am also in favour of the support and expansion of Afrikaans as academic language." (De Villiers, 2015).

The management of SU admits that language of instruction is, indeed, a problem and leads to frustration and distrust, while it becomes all too clear that language is an obstacle on the road to success (SU, 2015b).

⁵ *'Maties' is the nickname of students at Stellenbosch University.*

The cost of multilingualism is often used as the reason to avoid this option. A survey among students in faculties where the educational interpreting services are well established indicated that 74% of the students agree that it provides workable support to them (De Stadler, 2015; SU, 2015b). Various sources (cf. Du Plessis, 2010:143; Verhoef, 2010: 182; Webb, 2010: 161) indicate that interpreting services will take up less than 1% of the university's budget. In return the university will gain a lot in terms of cultural warmth and unity in diversity. However, one need to point out that an interpreted message is never as good as when a listener has full command of the language of the speaker. Hence, the Language Task Team (SU, 2015b) recommended that much more research should be done to improve the interpreting system.

More research is also required on how PMT can be adapted to other options and attention must especially be given to the attitudes, fears and needs of students, but also of staff (Webb, 2012: 218).

Arising from the annual general meeting of the Convocation of 2011, the Convocation requested the SU management on 25 September 2012 to develop an institutional action plan in which Afrikaans would have a rightful place and in which a welcoming culture, equality, diversity and transformation could flourish. On 14 May 2013, the SU Council approved the *Institutional Intent and Strategy for 2013 to 2018*, which included parallel-medium tuition and educational interpreting. This motion paved the way for a new Language Policy the Council of SU accepted on 22 November 2014 with an overwhelming majority at an extraordinary meeting.

The decision to accept a multilingual language policy is based on the fact that any student learns better in one specific language and that academic success greatly depends on the extent to which the student has mastered the language of instruction (Alexander, 1997; Webb, 2010). The core of the new Language Policy is multilingualism with equal status for Afrikaans and English, and the responsibility to promote IsiXhosa in a judicious way and where possible as an academic language and a language of social intercourse (SU, 2014).

The SU Council is of the opinion that the new policy will reaffirm SU's commitment to an open and transformed institution which simultaneously complies with the demands of a 21st century tertiary institution. The policy makes SU accessible to non-Afrikaans-speaking students, promotes equity and ensures a permanent place for Afrikaans as a language of instruction, while it also enhances Afrikaans as an academic language. In this way student success is assured. At the same time, SU will produce graduates who can function within the multilingual context of South Africa with the necessary sensitivity for linguistic diversity. The Council is of the opinion that SU in this way can reach its diversity goals more quickly. By 2018 non-white students should make up 50% of SU's student population (SU, 2014).

While the author admits that good practices have been developed at a number of universities which can serve as examples of change at SU, no-one must underestimate the challenges which still exist. The Language Policy and implementation of language specifications at Stellenbosch University have been in the spotlight since the end of 2015. De Villiers had to address dissatisfied students (SU, 2015a), which

resulted in an extraordinary Council meeting on 20 February 2016, where a motion was adopted providing for the introduction of an interim measure to allow flexibility in the application of language specifications for academic modules based on the following principles: "that language should be used in such a manner that no student is excluded from a lecture, and that the use of Afrikaans in lectures is ensured, promoted and encouraged" (SU, 2016a).

On 4 March 2016, *Afriforum* and five other Afrikaner civil organisations brought an application against the University for an order directing the University to implement, with immediate effect, the approved Language Policy and Plan of 2014, as well as the language specifications per module, as specified in faculty yearbooks (calendars) for 2016. The University acting on legal advice, abided by the court order, but Council requested its Executive Committee to appoint an independent person to investigate the recent language implementation process, to make a finding on how deviations originated and to recommend ways of addressing similar situations in future". Judge C T Howie, retired Judge President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, was subsequently appointed as Commissioner and submitted his report to Council on 14 April 2016 (SU, 2016a).

In his report Judge Howie concluded the following:

"Had the Faculties, the RMT and Council not taken the anti-exclusionary decisions and action they did, the University would have, on grounds explained in Counsel's opinion, have been vulnerable to constitutional challenge by students not proficient in Afrikaans. It is no small irony that having taken those steps, it felt vulnerable to the court challenges mounted by Afrikaans students, but this only serves to highlight the wisdom of having instituted the current review process aimed at amendment of the Policy and Plan. On the strength of the interviews and the documentation made available to me, I am of the opinion that all concerned were motivated to maintain and preserve the function, reputation and welfare of the University without infringing any students' constitutional rights."

The University, acting on legal advice, responded to this by re-iterating that the Language Policy approved in 2014 and the language specifications for 2016 will remain in force until the current Language Policy is reviewed, and amended or replaced.

It became apparent during the course of 2015 that some students are finding the implementation of language to be exclusionary. The University initiated a process of reviewing the Language Policy and to this end appointed a Language Revision Group. A first draft of a revised language policy was published and stakeholders were invited to submit their input by 22 April 2016 after which a second draft of the revised language policy was completed and considered by the Council meeting of 22 June 2016 (SU, 2016b). After the meeting the chair of the council issued the following press statement:

"The Council of Stellenbosch University (SU) today (22 June 2016) approved the proposed new Language Policy with the amendments proposed by Senate. By approving the proposed new Language Policy, Council has expressed its unequivocal support for multilingualism, without excluding students who are not proficient in either Afrikaans or English. The policy is based on the principles that the University's languages of in-

struction must promote access and academic success, and that the institution's language policy must serve its academic project. The policy explicitly makes provision for students who prefer to study in Afrikaans, while also improving access to education for students who are proficient in English only. The revised Language Policy acknowledges SU as a national asset and reaffirms our commitment to the users of Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, being the three official languages of our province." (SU, 2016b).

13. CONCLUSION

This article mainly investigated the past and the present situation of Afrikaans as a university language at Stellenbosch University with the aim to find the best language of instruction model for the future. Through the data and insights gained from the literature survey a number of sub questions which were investigated could be answered. It was ascertained there is, indeed, a need for transformation, not only because the government expected it, but also because the HAUs and SU by name have the responsibility to provide access to students who are neither Afrikaans, nor English speaking. As a university which strives to be a world class institution and to attract students and staff from the African continent and internationally, an exclusively Afrikaans language policy is untenable. Although the constitution gives students the right to tuition in the official language of their choice, and even if the choice of language of instruction at university level rests with the university council, the university must still prove that its policy is equitable and accessible. The new language policy nevertheless allows sufficient opportunity to promote Afrikaans as a university language.

Regarding Afrikaans as an academic language, our investigation showed a scaling down of Afrikaans: in Afrikaans tuition as well as publications in Afrikaans. Jean Laponce's two prerequisites but also De Varennes' (2010: 24) caution for a minority language, like Afrikaans, to survive is, is still relevant: firstly it depends on the extent to which Afrikaans will be used as a university language. In this regard, the intent of *Het Jan Marais Fund* (2015) and the *Dagbreektrust*⁶ (2015) to support scientific publications as well as dissertations in Afrikaans is welcomed. Secondly it is clear that a demand for instruction in Afrikaans still exists and the new language policy does indeed provided for it, especially at SU which is situated in an Afrikaans speaking province. But the market is shrinking. Afrikaans students are generally bilingual and willing to make concessions.

The study comes to the conclusion that there is still a place for Afrikaans as an academic language and a language of instruction at university level, but not as an exclusive Afrikaans university, as it will undermine diversity and transformation in Higher Education (Nzimande, 2014; DoBE, 1997). The goal should be to create universities of which the identity and institutional culture is neither black, nor white, nor Afrikaans, nor English, but which are unashamedly South African universities. Given the current multilingual context of Stellenbosch and against the background

⁶ *Two South African Funds with Afrikaans names aiming to enhance the Afrikaans Language.*

of SU's pursuit of continued transformation, a multilingual language policy seems to be the solution.

There are valid reasons for choosing multilingualism: The most important reason is that it provides opportunity for the majority of black learners to gain access to Stellenbosch University. As was pointed out earlier and based on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory students acquire higher levels of thinking by fostering social relationships facilitated by language. The model also provides for students to close the gap between the actual level of development and the potential level of development - the so called zone of proximal development (ZPD) – (Vygotsky, 1978:86) so that the student's knowledge of the language of instruction will be such to cope at tertiary level.

Similarly, multilingualism will support the student to effectively move between Cummins' (2008) two levels of language acquisition i.e. from *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skill* (BICS) to *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency* (CALP). Afrikaans speaking students and students with an indigenous language as their mother tongue, who have mastered English on a communicative level, but not yet as an academic language on the second level will also benefit from a multilingual model. It can be argued that the student's level of proficiency the language of instruction will gradually develop through social interaction with other students and lecturers in order for him/her to be successful at university. The rector of SU agrees:

“Stellenbosch is not an Afrikaans university; nor an English university, nor IsiXhosa university; SU is a multilingual university – which is surely needed in a country with 11 official languages. We are a world-class multilingual university that works hard to ensure that language is not a barrier to access (De Villiers (2015).

We conclude therefore that a multilingual language model will be ideal in guiding the students through collaboration to reach a higher level of proficiency in the language of instruction.

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