

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

LANGUAGE POLICY

Adopted on 14 March 2003

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic diversity is a resource for creativity and cognition that should be protected. Learning the languages of South Africa is a means of enhancing understanding of one another and of overcoming our differences. This policy is framed by the recognition that it is important for South Africa to maintain and develop all of its official languages. The resources of the University need to be mobilized to enhance the language competencies of staff and students and, in partnership with the government, play a role in the development of one of South Africa's African languages¹.

This policy is informed by the Constitution, the language research conducted at the University during 2002 (see Appendix A) and the Ministry of Education's *Language Policy for Higher Education* (see Appendix B). These documents make clear the necessity of developing a multilingual environment in which all languages are developed for use in education and the medium of instruction does not serve as a barrier to access and success. All educational institutions are required to produce a language policy that furthers transformation in South Africa. While respecting the autonomy of institutions to determine their own language policy, such determination has to be within the policy parameters set by government. The policy framework for higher education requires institutions to address the following issues

- languages of instruction
- the future of South African languages as fields of academic study and research
- the study of foreign languages
- the promotion of multilingualism in its policies and practices.

Johannesburg is the most linguistically diverse city in South Africa, which complicates decisions about language policy. At the University of the Witwatersrand, 76 home languages are spoken by staff and students. It is therefore difficult for the Institution to choose which language/s to develop and use, as no choice will satisfy the needs of all its staff and students. Sesotho and IsiZulu are the most widely understood African languages in the immediate environment of the University. Ideally the University should promote and support the development and use of both these languages. However, given financial constraints, the University commits itself to the development of Sesotho in the belief that institutions in kwaZulu-Natal are more suited to the development of IsiZulu.

The development of Sesotho will be phased. Phase 1 will focus on developing the materials and resources needed for the teaching of Sesotho as a subject at all levels of education. During Phase 1, staff who wish to begin learning Sesotho will be supported

¹ For the purposes of this policy document, 'African' refers to IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana, Northern Sotho, Siswati, Xitsonga, Tshivenda. It excludes Afrikaans because this language has already been developed for use in Higher Education.

by the University, provided that they attend courses that are approved in terms of the skills development levy. Phase 2 will focus on developing the linguistic abilities of staff and students. Staff and students who do not speak any African language will be required to become communicatively competent in Sesotho. Courses will be provided for staff and students who speak an African language or a foreign language to extend their competence in English. Students who have bilingual competence in English and an African language will be required to study another language of their choice. In Phase 3 the University will play a role in the development of the Sesotho language. Once Sesotho has been developed for use as a language of instruction in Higher Education, the University will, in Phase 4, prepare staff and students for the introduction of English and Sesotho as a bilingual medium of instruction. Students and staff should be able to switch between these languages.

English will remain the only medium of instruction at the University, until such time as it can be used together with Sesotho. Academic, administrative and support staff will be supported in acquiring the level of English competence they need to succeed in their jobs and students will be supported in acquiring the level of English competence they need to succeed in their studies and the world of work.

Research conducted at the University shows that many languages are used for social interaction at Wits, as well as in tutorials and practicals. It is also common practice for administrative and support staff to use English and African languages in both social and work contexts. The University will continue to encourage these multilingual practices.

POLICY

The University commits itself to multilingualism and the phased development of Sesotho as a language that can be used as a medium of instruction together with English. Phase 1 of the policy will be completed by 2010 and Phase 2 will begin in 2011. In 2011 the University will consider time frames for Phases 3 and 4, based on the national language landscape at the time. In order to achieve this policy, it will need to

- 1 Support multilingualism by
 - Allowing the use of all official eleven official languages for interaction on the University campus.
 - Translating key documents such as contracts, rules, application and registration forms, into the official languages of the province.
 - Providing interpreting services where necessary e.g. disciplinary hearings.
 - Including multilingual and multicultural practices at ceremonial gatherings e.g. graduations, inaugurations.
 - Providing a major in at least one foreign language.
- 2 Develop the Sesotho language
 - Research and develop language teaching resources, materials and courses in Sesotho for staff and students.

- Research and develop language teaching resources, materials and courses in Sesotho for primary and secondary education if this is financed by government.
 - Play a role, alongside government, in the development of the Sesotho language for use as a medium of instruction in Higher Education.
- 3 Develop the linguistic abilities of staff by
- Requiring full competence in English by all academic staff by the end of their probation period.
 - Providing courses for all administrative and support staff to acquire the English competence needed to perform their jobs. Require this competence within two years of their appointment.
 - Providing courses in English as a foreign language for foreign staff.
 - Providing courses in Sesotho/IsiZulu for academic, administrative and support staff from 2011.
 - Requiring staff who do not speak any African language to become communicatively competent in Sesotho or IsiZulu.
 - Paying for courses in Sesotho or IsiZulu that staff wish to take prior to 2011, provided that these courses are approved in terms of the skills development levy.
 - Paying for staff who wish to take courses in any other African language, provided that these courses are approved in terms of the skills development levy.
- 4 Develop the linguistic abilities of students by
- Requiring all students to achieve full competence in written and spoken English by the end of their first degree by providing the necessary support for academic literacy in English within the disciplines and in credit-bearing courses in English language and literacy.
 - Requiring foreign students who cannot demonstrate full competence in English to complete a non-credit-bearing course in English as a foreign language, appropriate to their level of study.
 - Requiring students who do not speak an African language to complete two credit-bearing modules in basic communicative competence in Sesotho or IsiZulu. These modules will be a requirement for all qualifications from 2011.
 - Providing a major in Sesotho or IsiZulu using newly researched materials. (The former having been developed at Wits).

RATIONALE

The rationale for the policy is related to each of the separate policy statements.

The rationale for multilingualism

South Africa's language policy since 1926 has ensured that all educated South Africans are at least bilingual. The majority of South Africans in urban areas, whether educated or not, are multilingual. According to research conducted at Wits, 80% of

the respondents use more than one language and 50% use three or more languages². All students should graduate from tertiary institutions in a post-apartheid South Africa with an ability to communicate in languages that cross the racial and cultural divide. In addition, it is important to give social status, not just official recognition, to all the languages that our students speak. No language should be excluded from the University campus as the University seeks to support the progressive elimination of language barriers to participation in the educational, cultural, social and economic life of the institution. The *Language Policy for Higher Education* supports the study of foreign languages, particularly those languages necessary for the country's cultural, trade and diplomatic relations. As the provision of foreign language instruction is costly, the University will negotiate the provision of foreign language instruction in the region, with Wits negotiating for French as its focus. The choice of French is based on the language research conducted at the University. In addition, French is an official language of the African Union and it is a language widely required for qualifications in science degrees internationally.

The need for translating and interpreting

It is important that students and staff understand all documents that are contractually binding on them, such as application and registration forms, acknowledgements of debt, loan agreements, rules and regulations. It is current practice to translate such documents and to provide interpreting services in situations such as disputes and disciplinary hearings. These practices will continue.

Rationale for the choice of Sesotho

The University cannot afford to offer instruction in all eleven official languages although it is government policy that the Higher Education system as a whole should endeavour to do so. Wits can contribute to this overall endeavour by developing at least one language. The choice of Sesotho is a strategic one. Our research shows 64.6% support for the choice of an Nguni language, with IsiZulu receiving 49.7% and IsiXhosa 14.9%. The Sotho languages receive 57.4% support with the highest support for Sesotho with 28.7%, Setswana 16.9% and Sepedi 11.8%. The choice of IsiZulu would receive the most popular support and IsiZulu is the home language of 11.1% of the student population, with 28.3% speaking a language from the Nguni family of languages. However, IsiZulu is the dominant African language in the country and needs to be promoted less than the other languages. Furthermore, we anticipate that institutions in kwaZulu-Natal will have a greater claim to becoming centres for the development of this language. Sesotho is the next logical choice. Sesotho is the home language of 11.3% of the student population with 32.1% speaking a language from the Sotho language family. It is the language widely spoken in this context; it is intelligible to speakers of the other Sotho languages; and it has only one natural institutional base within South Africa, namely the University of the Free State. The University of the Free State is geographically close enough to Wits to enable inter-institutional co-operation as is the University of Lesotho. The University of the Witwatersrand is uniquely placed to ensure that urban forms of the language are taken into consideration when the language is further developed.

² All percentages in this policy refer to a percentage of the respondents sampled in the Language Policy Research conducted at the University in 2002.

The rationale for the choice of Sesotho is also based on an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages related to the choice of each of the official African languages. (See Appendix C).

Rationale for the choice of English

The university, as a centre of excellence, would like to be known as producing graduates with a full command of the English language. English language skills are essential for a successful career in South Africa and internationally. It is a source of deep concern therefore that recent graduates of the University seem to struggle with achieving the levels of competence we would desire in oral and written communication. Research conducted at Wits indicates that there is overwhelming support by all students for improving their English language skills so that they attain mastery of oral and written competence. A concerted effort in all faculties to prioritise oral and written competence skills in English will ensure that Wits graduates have an above average chance of attaining successful careers. Qualifications should include credit-bearing courses in English for students who need them. In addition, non-credit bearing courses in English as a foreign language should be available for foreign staff and students who need them.

The need for teaching materials

The policy proposes the development of language teaching materials and appropriate pedagogy as the starting point. Existing textbooks and materials for teaching African languages are outdated and are framed by the apartheid curricula and syllabuses for which they were produced. In addition, these materials do not recognize urban dialects. Their insistence on standard forms, based on rural dialects, are alienating for urban students who speak Sesotho. Current approaches to teaching African languages need to take cognizance of developments in the field of Applied Linguistics and materials need to meet the needs of modern urban students and should not be limited to an apartheid vision of Sesotho-speaking students as living only in closed rural communities. All courses that are developed should be SAQA accredited so that the University can earn subsidies when it offers them to students and can claim from the skills development levy when staff complete them. The University needs to take financial responsibility for developing the resources for University courses, but will undertake the development for other levels of education if this is financed by government. The introduction of new and up-to-date courses for teaching Sesotho as both a home language and a second language in schools can only be achieved with the support of Government, the Gauteng Department of Education, schools and teachers.

The need for developing the language

Currently Sesotho, along with the other historically disadvantaged South African languages, is used in a limited number of domains. Because it has not been used in academic discourse, the language has not developed to meet the needs of such communication. It lacks the necessary lexicon and registers required for conceptual work across the academic disciplines. Now that the country has eleven official languages, it is important that the under-development and marginalisation of African languages is redressed. This work needs to be undertaken across the different research institutions in the country. The University should be a centre for the development of at least one African language. In selecting Sesotho, the University can provide an urban

perspective to the development of the language. Once the Ministry of Education and the Department of Arts and Culture have decided on the means to develop South African languages for use in instruction in higher education, including costing and time frames, the University will play an active role in the development of Sesotho.

The need for developing the linguistic abilities of staff

It follows that if the University is moving towards the adoption of two languages of communication and teaching in Phase 4, staff have to be given the opportunity to acquire the linguistic competencies needed in both English and Sesotho to do their jobs well. These abilities will contribute to the transformation of the institution. When teaching staff are able to communicate concepts in both Sesotho and English, this will make an important contribution to students' learning.

The need for developing the linguistic abilities of students

All students need full competence in English to excel in their academic studies, to have access to the international literature, and to be prepared for the world of work. Courses in academic literacy and English are the responsibility of Faculties, Schools and disciplines and competence is already a requirement in all qualifications. The language policy research conducted by the University is unequivocal in stressing the need for courses that enable the acquisition by students of full spoken and written competence in English. There is evidence to suggest that speakers of African languages would like more support than the University is currently offering.

Courses in Sesotho will be provided for students who do not speak an African language. Learning Sesotho will enable students who do not speak an African language, to interact differently with their fellow South Africans at the University and outside it. In addition, learning a non-cognate language (that is a language that originates from a different family of languages) provides insight to alternative ways of construing the world. For foreign students, learning Sesotho will enable them to communicate with the broader community in and around Johannesburg.

Graduates who are fully bilingual in English and Sesotho, or another African language, are better prepared for the world of work in South Africa. In addition, they will be able to undertake research on a broader range of questions in Sotho-speaking communities.

Rationale for bilingual medium of instruction in the long term

The policy sets the University on the path to introducing a bilingual-medium of instruction in Phase 4. This will depend on the success of the government's current *Language Policy in Higher Education*.

The University acknowledges that language should not be a barrier to the acquisition of knowledge. Currently millions of South Africans do not complete their schooling, partly because they are taught and assessed through the medium of English or Afrikaans and have no access to concepts in a language that they fully understand. To overcome this legacy, it is essential to develop the African languages of South Africa in order to provide equal access to education. Sesotho-English bilingual medium of instruction in Higher Education will remove the barrier to introducing Sesotho-medium of instruction at lower levels. Although the University is working towards a

bilingual policy of instruction, other available linguistic resources that might aid students' understanding will be used. For example, multilingual practices in tutorials will continue; materials and resources developed by other institutions in the other South African languages will be included in the University's libraries.

The University rejects dual medium of instruction - where some subjects are taught through the medium of Sesotho and some through the medium of English - as all students need access to the international literature in English. The University also rejects parallel medium of instruction - where all courses are repeated in each language - as this is both costly and likely to separate students along lines of language preference. The aim in choosing a bilingual-medium policy is to enable staff and students to attain sufficient bilingual competence to manage oral code-switching in their disciplines. Code-switching, a natural practice of bilingual and multilingual speakers, is also common practice in most South African schools.

2011 is given as the date for considering time frames for Phases 3 and 4. Factors which will affect the decision will be the policy/legislative environment at this time as well as the extent to which development of capacity to teach bilingually both in the University and in the school system has been attained by this time.

The rationale for shared responsibility with the government

The University undertakes to research and develop materials and resources in Sesotho and English for University-based courses for its staff and students. It further commits itself to playing a role in developing resources for teaching Sesotho at other levels of education and in developing the Sesotho language, provided that this work is funded by the government. It also notes that the implementation of Phase 4 is dependent on schools producing students who are at least bilingual in English and an African language.

IMPLEMENTATION

Each successive Phase of implementation depends on the success of the previous stage and Phases 3 and 4, depend on progress made in primary and secondary education and with the progress of national and provincial language policy. This policy provides a vision and Phases 1 and 2 place the University on a path to realise this vision, should policy progress as imagined by the Ministry of Education's *Language Policy for Higher Education*, November 2002. Table 1 provides an overview of Phases 1 to 4.

The appendices are available on request from Ms Noxolo Mrwetyana, Office of the Deputy Registrar (Academic Administration).