

South African Language Rights Bulletin



Welcome to the combined fourth and fifth issues in the third volume of the South African Language Rights Bulletin (SALRB). The aim of the monthly Bulletin is to provide the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) with an overview of the developments on the language front in South Africa, as reflected in the country's mainstream newspapers. English- and Afrikaans-language newspaper records are drawn from the SA Media database, while Zulu records are collected from the bi-weekly *Ilanga*, as well as the daily and Sunday newspaper, *Isoleswe*.

Although the main focus is on language rights, the Bulletin also covers other language-related problems. The contentious issue of name changes in contemporary South Africa, though related to the issue of language problems, is dealt with separately. Newspaper coverage of aspects of language promotion, language research and language (rights) activism also receives attention.

Owing to the complex data-processing system of SA Media, the collection of printed media records analysed in this Bulletin is not complete; and conclusions reached are of a preliminary nature. Adjustments will be made in the corresponding annual South African Language Rights Monitor (SALRM), which will be prepared for PanSALB once the data-collection process has been completed. In the meantime, the SALRB aims to help PanSALB to remain abreast of language (rights) developments in the country.

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Promoting the African languages – Some snippets

Late in 2008, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism embarked on a campaign aimed at encouraging young Africans to read books in their home languages. Initiatives included a partnership with publishing houses, as well as writing workshops. The launch of the campaign coincided with the Provincial Literature Exhibition at the Durban Exhibition Centre, where Zulu and Xhosa works are showcased annually. Among the books that were launched was *Enecala Kayiphumuli* by 21-year-old Lungile Zondi. Various authors received prizes (worth R61 000 in total) from Maskew Miller Longman and the Department (*Daily News*, 15/12/08).

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In a promotional article, the *City Press* of 7 December focused on the language policy of the SABC:

“More than 27 million South African viewers and listeners turn to the SABC every day to receive the latest news and information in their preferred language.

Such is the reach and scope of the SABC’s news service that more than 86% of the country’s adult population rely on the SABC as their primary source for news and current affairs [...]

SABC News has defined its mission to provide credible, accurate and interesting news programming, including bulletins and current affairs shows that bring news of the country, Africa and the world into everyone’s homes in everyone’s languages.”

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During January, an article in the *Witness* (07/01/09) profiled John Langalibalele Dube (1871-1946) – a founding member of the ANC and the organisation’s first president, who was also the author of the first Zulu novel, *U-Jeje, Insila ka Tshaka*. Twenty-one years after its publication in 1931, it was translated into English as *Jeje, the Body-Servant of King Shaka*. In 2008, the English version was reissued as a Penguin Modern Classic.

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Under the heading “English speaker writes book about learning Zulu – An adventure in communication”, the *Witness* (22/01/09) also published a positive review of *Forgive me, I’m an impatient mlungu (and other useful things to know how to say in Zulu)* by Pam Sherriffs.

Literature prizes of 2008

Andrew Murray

Jan du Randt

Die A-Z van Openbaring

Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu

John de Gruchy

Being Human

ATKV (children)

Alana Bailey

Die Prinses van die Afrikavlaktes

ATKV (children)

Annelize Bester

Kersvader se Groot Glips

ATKV (children)

Carina Diedericks-Hugo

Thomas@aksie-net

ATKV (children)

Christa Jonker-Jordaan

Lyf

ATKV (children)

Fanie Viljoen

Various

ATKV (children)

Jaco Jacobs

Totsiens, Sugarplum

ATKV (prose)

Chris Karsten

Frats

ATKV-woordveertjies

Deon Meyer

Onsigbaar

ATKV-woordveertjies

Marijke Greef

Seerower vir Sharika

ATKV-woordveertjies

Sophia Kapp

Die Erflating

ATKV-Woordwystoekening

Philip Louw (ed.)

Oxford School Dictionary

Exclusive Books

Stieg Larsson

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

Helgaard Steyn

Hermann Giliomee

Die Afrikaners

Promoting Afrikaans – Some snippets

The slogan of the **Afrikaanse Taalraad** [Afrikaans Language Council – ATR] will be “*Aktief, Aktueel, Afrikaans*” [Active, Actual/Topical, Afrikaans]. *Beeld* reported on 8 December that this slogan had been chosen from among ± 500 proposals that had been submitted in an SMS competition. Established in May 2008 and administered by the Akademie, the ATR represents 40 Afrikaans/Afrikaner organisations with a combined membership of 500 000 individuals. The organisation is committed to the active maintenance and promotion, not only of Afrikaans, but of all the indigenous languages of South Africa (*Rapport*, 08/06/08). In view of the fact that the Afrikaans (or rather, the Afrikaner) community has never suffered from a shortage of language activists, the new slogan is rather apt.

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On 13 December, the *Burger* published an article on the role of the **Akademie** in the development of Afrikaans as a cultural and scientific language. The organisation is celebrating its centenary in 2009. In the article, Prof. Pieter Kapp makes what some may regard as a controversial claim: “Through its tireless work [the Akademie] helped to get the Pan South African Language Board going and to guide it in the right direction” (own translation).

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According to a report in the *Burger* (22/12/08), the Municipal Property Rates Act had been translated into Afrikaans by the **Vereniging van Regslui vir Afrikaans** [Society of Legal Practitioners for Afrikaans – VRA]. Afrikaans versions of the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, the National Credit Act and the Children’s Act would also soon be available on the Internet in the form of free downloads (www.vra.co.za/wetgewing).

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During December, two events which took place at the Afrikaans Language Monument in Paarl received newspaper coverage, namely the annual *rieldanskompetisie* [reel dance competition] (*Burger*, 06/08/08) and the unveiling of a bust of the black Afrikaans poet Adam Small (*Rapport*, 21/12/08; *Burger*, 09/01/09). Small, who celebrated his 72nd birthday on 21 December (the day after the event), is the first South African poet to be honoured in this way. The speaker at the unveiling ceremony was **SBA** head Christo van der Rheede. In a speech entitled “In service of cultural empowerment and political activism at grassroots level”, Van der Rheede reflected, among other things, on Small’s contribution to the Struggle: “What many of Small’s critics did not realise, was that his involvement with the marginalised speakers of Afrikaans was part of exactly the same liberation agenda as theirs. [The difference, in Small’s case,] was that it had been stripped of the elitism and classicism that had characterised much of the political activism of the time. This elitism was, of course, closely linked to the use of English” (own translation).

Helgaard Steyn

Marlene van Niekerk
Agaat

Hertzog (poetry)
Breyten Breytenbach
Die Windvanger

Ingrid Jonker
Megan Hall
Fourth Child

Jan Rabie-Rapport
Willem Anker
Siegfried

M.E.R.
S.A. Partridge
The Goblet Club

Maskew Miller Longman
Cecilia du Toit
Boetie Beter Bester

M-Net
Etienne van Heerden
Asbesmiddag

Protea
Breyten Breytenbach
Die Windvanger

Sanlam (Afrikaans): Gold
Derick van der Walt
Lien se Lankstaanskoene

Sanlam (Afrikaans): Silver
Fanie Viljoen
Onderwêreld

Sanlam (English): Gold
Gill D’achada
Sharkey’s Son

Sanlam (English): Silver
John Coetzee
Dance of the Freaky Green Gold

UJ (debut)
Willem Anker
Siegfried

UJ
Breyten Breytenbach
Die Windvanger

W.A. Hofmeyr
Breyten Breytenbach
Die Windvanger

Source: *Burger*, 19/12/08

Becoming parallel-medium: Acceptance and resistance

The Pretoria High Court turned down an application by the Tabok (*Trust vir Beheerliggame vir Onderwys en Kultuur*) Derdepoort Parents Committee for the retention of the single-medium status of the Hoërskool F.H. Odendaal in Pretoria. F.H. Odendaal had been an Afrikaans-only school since its inception; yet at the end of 2006/beginning of 2007, the school's governing body (SGB) had decided to opt for a policy of parallel-medium tuition, in an effort to reverse declining enrolment and the resultant loss of personnel. Citing the Constitution and the Schools' Act of 2006, Judge Cynthia Pretorius ruled that "the court cannot review the decision of the governing body, as the decision was taken in a lawful manner by a body which was democratically elected by the parents" (*Pretoria News*, 15/12/08; cf. also *Beeld*, 15/12/08).

As F.H. Odendaal voluntarily entered 2009 as a parallel-medium school, events on the first school day at the Hoërskool Hans Strijdom in Mookgophong (Naboomspruit) were reminiscent of those at Hoërskool Ermelo in Mpumalanga a year before. (At the time of writing, the case of *Ermelo High School v Head of Department: Mpumalanga Department of Education* was on appeal.) Claiming that they were only defending their language rights, members of Hans Strijdom's SGB rejected a request from the Limpopo education department that ten new enrolments who wished to be taught in English should be accommodated in a separate class. The FF+ interpreted the government's position as an attack on Afrikaans schools (*Beeld*, 17/01/08).

Language rights in the Free State

At the beginning of 2009, language rights issues featured prominently in the *Volksblad*. A range of projects initiated by the Mangaung municipality with a view to promoting multilingualism in the Free State comprised the focus of one report (*Volksblad*, 05/01/09). On a less positive note, the newspaper reported on 17 January that AfriForum had lodged a complaint with PanSALB against the training hospital of the University of the Free State (UFS), Universitas. This followed a decision by the hospital that all administrative communication, including all written communication concerning patients (reports, consultations, prescriptions, etc.), should in future be in English. The decision was upheld at a meeting between the management of the hospital and members of the UFS's faculty of health sciences. The meeting decided, however, that service rounds could be conducted in any language that all participants understood. It was also emphasised that communication with patients should preferably be conducted in their home languages. Training at Universitas would continue to take place in accordance with the parallel-medium tuition policy of the UFS (*Volksblad*, 23/01/09; cf. also *Volksblad*, 26/01/09).

Jonathan Jansen in Afrikaans on activism for Afrikaans:

Hierdie populêre T-hemp is steeds in die omtrek waar ek woon: "Praat Afrikaans of hou jou bek". Of die regse banier: "Slegs Engels is erger as Slegs Blankes". Vir die taalstryder lyk dit oulik, maar dit is pynlik en vervreemdend teenoor nie-Afrikaanssprekers [...] Die verbandhoudende skakels tussen Afrikaans en gemeenheid moet finaal gebreek word. My voorstel is 'n vriendelikhedsoffensief in die townships onder potensiële lesers en gebruikers van die taal, eerder as betogings in die strate teen die verandering van Afrikaanse name. My voorstel is omgekeerde bemagtiging, met Rapport-beurse wat nie net aan reeds Afrikaanssprekende, hoofsaaklik wit studente wat onderwysers wil word, gaan nie, maar ook aan swart studente wat daarin belangstel om die Afrikaans taal aan te leer.

– Burger, 30/12/08

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Patrick Laurence on significant political events of 2008:

A third characterising trait in the political arena during the past year has been the emergence of radical demagoguery, laced with character assassination and hate speech, as part of the political discourse. It is typified by Julius Malema, the ANC Youth League president, in his June 16 speech, when he warned that the youth league would "take up arms and kill for Zuma" if the corruption charges against him led to his disqualification as a presidential candidate to succeed Mbeki. The chanting by ANC members in Orange Farm, near Johannesburg, of the slogan "Kill Lekota, Kill Shilowa" fall [sic] into the same category.

– Sunday Independent, 28/12/08

Court asked to enforce promulgation of national language policy

In an application brought against the government, the Minister of Arts and Culture, the Minister of Justice and the Pan South African Language Board, a Brits-based attorney is requesting the Pretoria High Court to enforce the finalisation and promulgation of a national language policy, in order to make it possible for South Africans to “be served by government departments, including the courts, in their own language” (*Pretoria News*, 15/12/08). Cornelius Lourens is also demanding a language audit of government departments “to determine which languages are predominantly spoken in those departments and whether the officials employed in those departments are able to serve people in their languages”. As a founding member of the *Vereniging van Regslui vir Afrikaans*, Lourens claims to be acting on behalf of Afrikaans-speakers, yet he believes that other language communities would also benefit. As reported in the *Pretoria News* (15/12/08), he expressed the view that the African languages of South Africa “have suffered great historical neglect and are threatened with extinction if the court [does] not step in”. Lourens added that the government, by failing to implement a national language policy, was hampering the development of these languages. (Cf. also *Beeld*, 17/12/08.)

Preparing for the 2010 Soccer World Cup

In preparation for the 2010 Soccer World Cup, foreign-language courses are being introduced in various provinces. In Gauteng, the Bosele Economic and Social Advancement Forum (Besaf) launched a programme – based on the Core International Language Project – which would be monitored, graded and certified by the Wits Language School. The aim was to train unemployed former liberation-army combatants as language tutors: “We want the youth to speak and read foreign languages so as to take advantage of employment opportunities [e.g. as interpreters] during the 2010 Soccer World Cup,” said Besaf chairperson George Phutiayagae. By the end of 2008, almost a hundred members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association had registered for the course (*Sowetan*, 30/12/08).

In the Eastern Cape, the provincial education department was tasked by the 2010 provincial steering committee with language training for the World Cup. In its turn, the department approached the Port Elizabeth-based Bay Language Institute, requesting it to train volunteers (all unemployed graduates) in French, Spanish, Portuguese and German, with a view to assisting speakers of these (and other) languages. According to Christophe Freschi of the Alliance Française – an organisation which was also involved – the greatest emphasis would fall on French, as 40% of the visiting soccer fans would be French-speaking (*EP Herald*, 30/01/09).

Parliament sets an example

“Parliament’s Language Services Section is paramount for the provision of essential interpreting and translation services for Members of Parliament and the production of the official record of Parliament called Hansard. In 2003, the cultural diversity of South Africans was recognised when Parliament adopted its much anticipated Language Policy. This means that Members of Parliament [...] are able to closely follow the proceedings in the House in any of the 11 official languages as well as sign language. The public [are] also able to grasp debates and speeches in the House in the language of their choice, through the use of interpreting devices available in the public gallery.

Language Services is shaping up for yet more changes as outlined by its Section Manager, Mr Mbuyisazwe Hector Tshabalala. ‘We are in the process of extending our interpreting services to committees where the bulk of Parliament’s work is done [...] Sixty sessional language practitioners have been identified and will be appointed to provide interpreting services in committees.’ These eagerly awaited sessional language practitioners [...] will be assisting with the translation of Hansard into all the official languages. The Translation Unit is also expanding to employ translators to translate Parliament’s Daily Papers into all official languages.

‘It is an expensive process,’ explained Mr Tshabalala, but ‘Parliament has taken the decision that people who wish to access information about Parliament must be able to do so in their home languages.’”

From: *The Sunday Independent*, 14/12/08 (“Parliamentary service gears up for 2009”)

President Kgalema Motlanthe on place-name changes

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, few things have been as divisive as the process of changing apartheid and colonial names. This does not need to be the case. Instead, handled properly, the re-examination of place names could be used as a vehicle for nation building.

Just as the cities, towns, streets, rivers and mountains of this country belong to all its people, we should ensure that all South Africans can embrace the names we use to identify these features.

Since the arrival of white settlers in the land now known as South Africa, place names have been used as a means of dispossession, both physically and psychologically [...]

The desire to change the names of these places is, therefore, understandable. More than that, it is necessary to ensure that the languages, culture, history, aspirations and heritage of all South Africans [are] reflected in the names that are given to the world they inhabit.

If South Africa is to shake off the colonial yoke, it will need, among other things, to change many place names. This has begun across the country, initiated in the main by local and provincial governments, as well as national departments.

Yet, at the process has unfolded, it has been met with resistance and has exacerbated old divisions in communities. Some sections of society have labelled the name changes ahistorical, culturally insensitive, wasteful, politically partisan and unnecessary.

[This] has resulted in acrimonious exchanges and court challenges.

This need not be the case. By approaching name changes differently, this process can serve to unite rather than divide, and to build a sense of common purpose and destiny [...]

The law is clear on the requirements for changing place names. There is a set of principles for geographical names in South Africa, including that each feature should have one official name [...]
However, if the review of place names is to play a constructive role in society, it might be necessary to develop an approach that extends beyond formal and legal elements [– an approach that] reduces the scope for conflict, builds understanding between sections of the community and encourages a sense of common ownership.

– Cape Argus, 04/12/08 (First appeared in ANC Today, 28/11/08)

Prepared for PanSALB by



Faculty of the Humanities
University of the Free State
PO Box 339
Bloemfontein
9300

Tel. +27 (0)51 401 2405
Fax +27 (0)51 444 5804

<http://www.uovs.ac.za>

Editor: Mariana Kriel
krielm.hum@ufs.ac.za

