

South African Language Rights Bulletin



Welcome to the second issue 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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On the international front

Unesco's International Translation Day was celebrated on 1 October. The theme this year was "Terminology: words matter" (*Burger*, 01/10/08).

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The decision by the government of the Netherlands to declare Dutch as the country's official language in the constitution was welcomed in the Afrikaans press (*Burger*, 24/10/08), as was the possible entry of Afrikaans into the *Nederlandse Taalunie* [Dutch Language Union – NTU] (*Volksblad*, 13/10/08).

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In an article for the *Mail and Guardian* (16/10/08), Moses Magadza addressed one of the language-related problems facing Namibia: "where is the country going to get the expertise to establish proficiency in the English language when most of the teachers of the language today are those who were denied a chance to study it themselves?" The solution, in Magadza's view, was to recruit English teachers from other SADC countries.

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The government of Rwanda announced that in future, English would be the language of tuition in the country's schools. At the time when this decision was taken (October 2008), more than 95% of Rwanda's secondary schools were still teaching mainly in French. But, as Gwynne Dyer explained in an article for the *Citizen* (20/10/08), the move was predictable: the present government – unlike its predecessors (the genocidal Hutu regime) – speaks mainly English. Almost all Rwandans, whether Hutu or Tutsi, speak Kinyarwanda.

FAK reflects on Afrikaners and their language

A conference focusing on "The Constitutional Status of Afrikaners, 2008" was held in Pretoria/Tshwane on 17 and 18 October 2008. It was a project of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* [Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations – FAK], whose ambition it is to create opportunities for Afrikaners – especially young ones – to lead a more meaningful life in Afrikaans. Columnist Jaap Steyn described the conference as part of an Afrikaner renaissance – a reaction, as he interpreted it, against "the elimination of Afrikaans from public life" during Thabo Mbeki's presidency (*Beeld*, 09/10/08).

Speakers at the FAK conference included Profs Hermann Giliomee and André Duvenhage (NWU), as well as Mr Flip Buys (executive head: Solidarity). Giliomee's paper on the position of Afrikaans in education elicited the most publicity (*Rapport*, 19/10/08; *Beeld*, 20, 28/10/08). He warned that the decline of Afrikaans as a language of tertiary education would impact negatively on the position of the language in secondary and primary schools.

SBA Head Christo van der Rheede on language and development:

I have read the article "UCT set to launch landmark programme to empower poor" (Cape Argus, October 1) with great interest. One of the key features of the programme is to help South Africans realise the transformative vision of their Constitution. But the challenge for social justice is first to recognise the most fundamental right – language. Development agencies and activists often ignore the importance of indigenous languages and the role they should play in developing communities.

– Letter to the *Cape Argus*, 06/10/08

Language guru David Crystal on "txt spk":

[T]here is no evidence that texting teaches people to spell badly: rather, research shows that those kids who text frequently are the more likely to be the most literate and the best spellers, because you have to know how to manipulate language.

– Quoted in the *Mail and Guardian*, 02/10/08

Champions of the Zulu language recognised

In a letter to *Ilanga* (09/10/08), M. Kheswa of Ulundi paid tribute to Zulu-speakers C.T. Msimang, D.B.Z. Ntuli, B.W. Vilakazi, S. Nyembezi, O.E.H.M. Nxumalo and Thokozani Nene – all of whom have promoted the language in various ways. According to the author of the letter, these persons should serve as an inspiration to all Zulus to “speak their own language correctly and with pride”. On a more pessimistic note, Kheswa expressed his/her concern about the “impure” use of Zulu on the radio.

Teaching Zulu as a third language was discriminatory, court rules

In contrast to September, which was a quiet month on the language-rights front, language rights – and particularly language rights in education – featured prominently in the newspapers of October. By far the most newsworthy event in this field was the ruling by the Equality Court that the former language policy of the Durban High School (DHS) discriminated against Zulu-speakers. No fewer than ten newspaper reports – including one that appeared in *Isolezwe* (01/10/08) – covered the outcome of this case, which had been brought to court in January 2008 by PanSALB CEO Ntombenhle Nkosi (*Beeld*, 01, 02/10/08; *Cape Times*, 01/10/08; *Citizen*, 01/10/08; *Daily News*, 01/10/08; *The Times*, 01/10/08; *Sunday Independent*, 05/10/08; *Sunday Tribune*, 05/10/08; *EP Herald*, 07/10/08).

Mrs Nkosi complained that her son had been taught (sub-standard) Zulu as a second additional language (LLC3) at the DHS in 2007. In terms of the school’s language policy for Grade 8 learners (which has since been amended), the boy, whose mother tongue is Zulu, had been obliged to study English as a first language (LLC1) and Afrikaans as a first additional language (LLC2). Nkosi argued that this practice was promoting the subjugation of African languages while elevating English and Afrikaans. Magistrate John Sanders agreed. On 30 September 2008, he found that the offering of Afrikaans as a subject at a higher level than Zulu constituted unfair discrimination against learners whose home language was Zulu. In passing judgement, Sanders expressed the view that Zulu should ideally be offered at first-language level in KwaZulu-Natal schools. This would require a “serious commitment” by the state to provide the necessary resources.

In his reaction, Director General of Education Duncan Hindle noted that “[t]eachers of African languages are [...] among our most scarce resources” (*Sunday Tribune*, 05/10/08). Nevertheless, he added that every school in South Africa should offer at least one African language at LLC2 level and should try to offer more than one language at LLC1 level.

Conflicting views on language-in-education (1)

Our African languages still do not receive the recognition they deserve in real terms.

Language is the vehicle of cultural transmission and is thus central to the development of a nation.

Our African languages are beautiful, unique and deserve to be respected.

It is therefore both embarrassing and distressing to witness parents who immerse their children in a foreign language such as English.

The importance of English cannot be denied, but these parents in their gullibility equate the mastery of English with intelligence.

The truth is, there is no connection between the mastery of English and intelligence.

Instead, their actions constitute the self-imposed perpetration of the cultural emasculation of black people.

By depriving their children of the opportunity, nay, the right to acquire proficiency in their mother tongue, these parents actually rob their children of their cultural heritage.

– Nathaniel Lee (Soweto) in a letter to the *Star*, 29/10/08

In other news on language rights issues...

Eugene Hadebe, the chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal Transport Alliance, complained to the media that the new proposed National Land Transport Bill had not been translated into Zulu: "I am very angry and disgusted", he said. "The government knows well that most people in the taxi industry are not educated and yet they give us Bills that affect us written only in English" (*Daily News*, 07/10/08).

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The Cape-based organisation *Vriende van Afrikaans* [Friends of Afrikaans] complained that they had received English-only notices of postal box renewals from the South African Post Office. According to executive officer Amanda de Stadler, the *Vriende* had been complaining about this for three years (*Burger*, 09/10/08).

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In her reaction to the SABC's annual report that was released during October, columnist Kate Skinner noted that "[b]uried deep in the report, mention is made of the struggles the SABC has had to meet its language targets". Yet according to her, the following question remained unanswered: "what progress, over time, against specific targets, has been made with regard to the SABC fulfilling its language and local content requirements?" (*Mail and Guardian*, 30/10/08).

Street-name changes

As was the case in respect of September, the vast majority of October's collection of records on place-name changes dealt specifically with changes to street names.

In Alexandra, six prominent streets were renamed at an unveiling ceremony on 25 October:

Hofmeyer → Richard Baloyi

London → Vincent Tshabalala

Rooseveltdt → Alfred Nzo

Rooth → Josias Madzunya

Selbourne → Reverend Sam Buti

Vasco da Gama → Moposho

(*Citizen*, 23/10/08; *City Press*, 26/10/08).

In Cape Town, Mayor Helen Zille requested that the street-renaming item should be withdrawn from the city council's agenda. In commentator Brett Herron's opinion, Zille was "acting with an eye on her party's internal factions and a fear of the DA's conservative wing". In an article for the *Cape Argus* (30/10/08), Herron pointed out that the list of 31 proposed changes was modest in nature, and the product of a participatory process.

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Conflicting views on language-in-education (2)

The vast majority of black people in this country, including me, want their children to be taught English in school. To insist on teaching African languages in school goes against the democratic wishes of the majority of parents in this country.

The reasons we want our kids to know English are obvious. There is an entire world of knowledge, skills, jobs, power and influence totally closed to us if we speak only an indigenous language [...] I value my own language. I love its richness, its idiom, its history. I enjoy speaking it when I go home. But to spend precious resources in artificially promoting languages which actually imprison people is illogical.

Such resources should be spent on promoting the learning of a language which opens doors for the human mind, like English.

– Jabulani Shiraya (Cape Town) in a letter to the *Cape Argus*, 16/10/08

In Durban, the DA and the IFP filed a joint high court application to set aside the renaming of more than 100 city streets. The applicants argued, among other things, that the main road in Umlazi should be named after Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as he was “an icon among the Zulu nation”. The reaction of the ANC – which was reported in the Afrikaans, English and Zulu press – was: “We believe this statement is widely exaggerated and highly challengeable. Buthelezi may be an icon among his party members, but not necessarily the Zulu nation as a whole. Buthelezi is merely respected as an old politician, Inkosi of the Buthelezi clan and as an elderly citizen who’s well known in the province” (ANC provincial secretary Senzo Mchunu, quoted in the *Daily News*, 20/10/08).

In Pretoria/Tshwane, the Metro Council held a series of public consultation meetings aimed at giving residents the opportunity to express their views about the proposed renaming of 27 inner-city streets. Yet, as the *City Press* (12/10/08) reported, “the result has been anything but a calm, multiracial debate on the history and heroes to be reflected in the names of the capital”. The meetings at the East Lynne community centre and the Sammy Marks auditorium “degenerated into dreadful public battles between Africans and Afrikaners, howling, hissing and trading insults”. As a rule, at least according to *Beeld* (11/10/08), black participants in the meetings supported the street-renaming process, while white participants opposed it, arguing that it would cost too much and that the council was intent on destroying their heritage.

FF+ councillor Cornelius Jansen van Rensburg (also the youth leader of his party) was ordered to leave after disrupting a meeting with “persistent, loud and insulting comments on black speeches”. By the time he was thrown out, the Sammy Marks auditorium was reportedly “filled with seething waves of resentment between white and black people” (*City Press*, 12/10/08). At the Pretoria North City Hall, violence erupted: the meeting ended in fistfights, with chairs being thrown around. The police were called to restore order (*Beeld*, 23/10/08). Opting for a less extreme form of activist behaviour, the FF+ (joined by AfriForum and the FAK) filed an application against the Tshwane Metro Council in the Pretoria High Court (*Beeld*, 25/10/08; *Pretoria News*, 30/10/08).

The conflict over street names in Pretoria/Tshwane had not only racial but also linguistic overtones, as the *Pretoria News* (08/10/08) reported: “[Chairperson Sonto Thipe] was confronted immediately when she opened the meeting [at the East Lynne community centre] with one unruly faction demanding that the meeting be conducted in Afrikaans. An altercation then followed, with Thipe saying she was an isiZulu speaker, but was speaking in English to accommodate everyone. An interpreter was eventually assigned, which prolonged the meeting because the crowd interrupted him.”

In the townships (*i.a.* Soshanguve, Atteridgeville, Mabopane, Mamelodi), the public consultation meetings were poorly attended.

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